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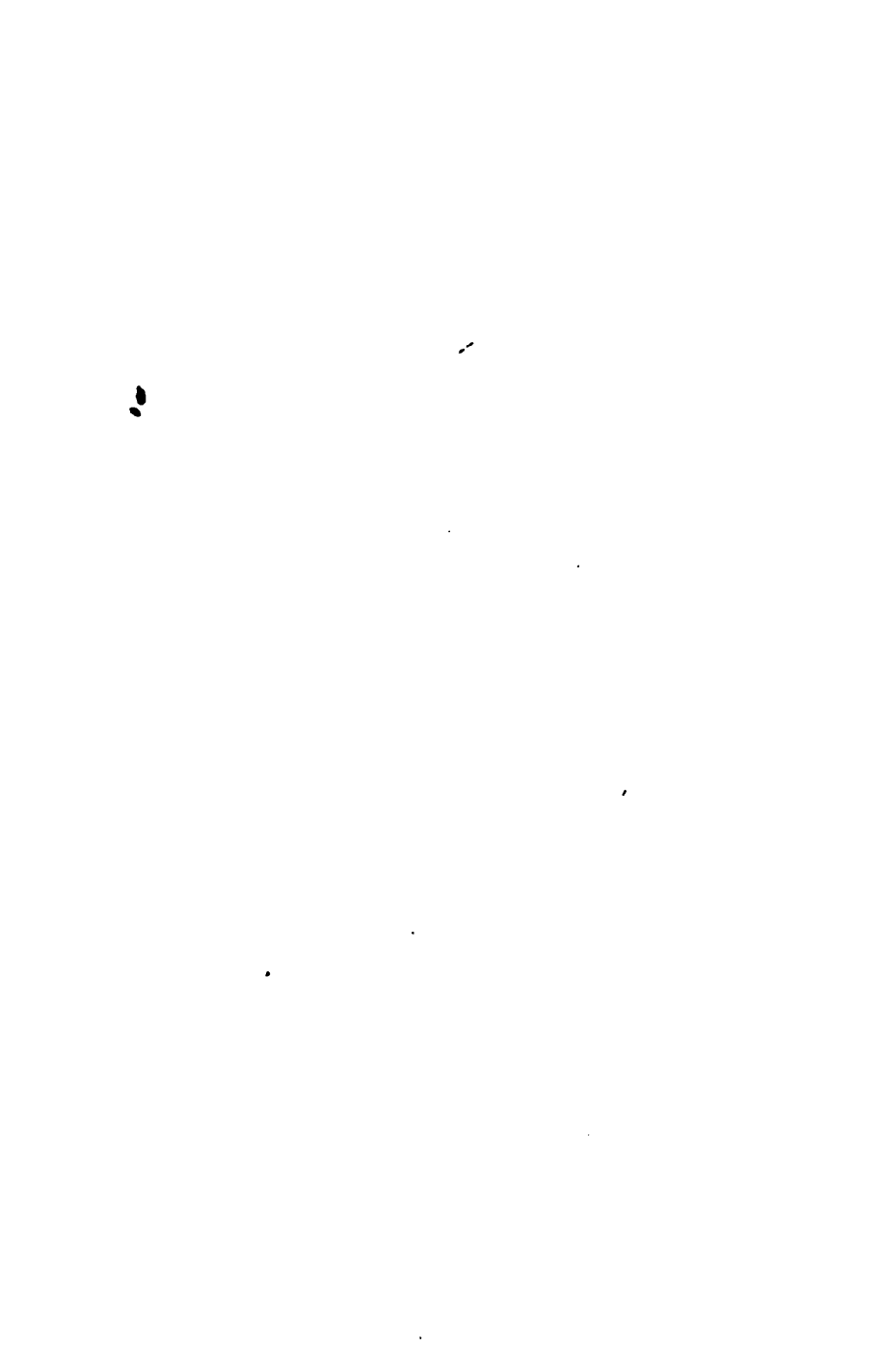
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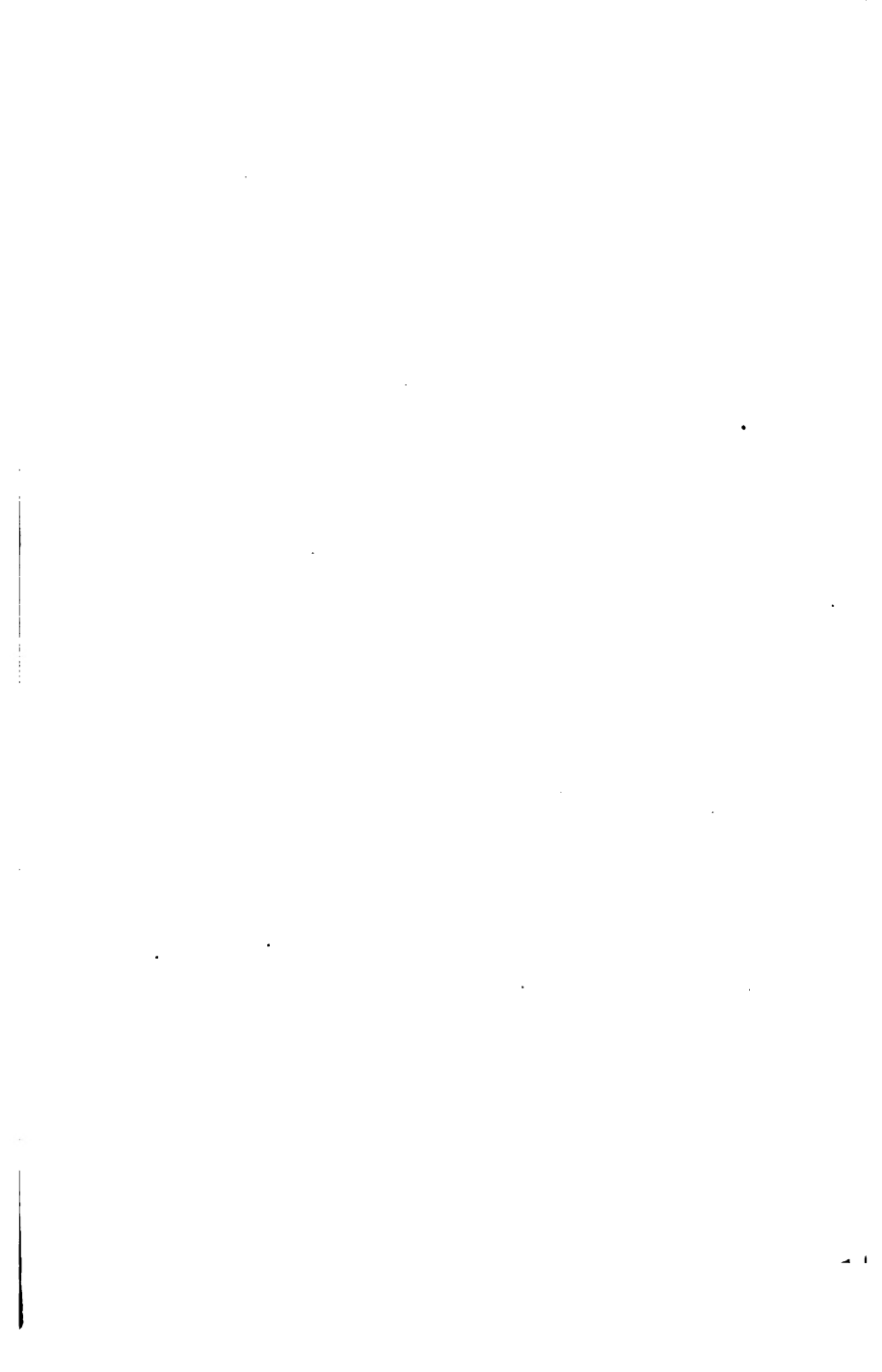


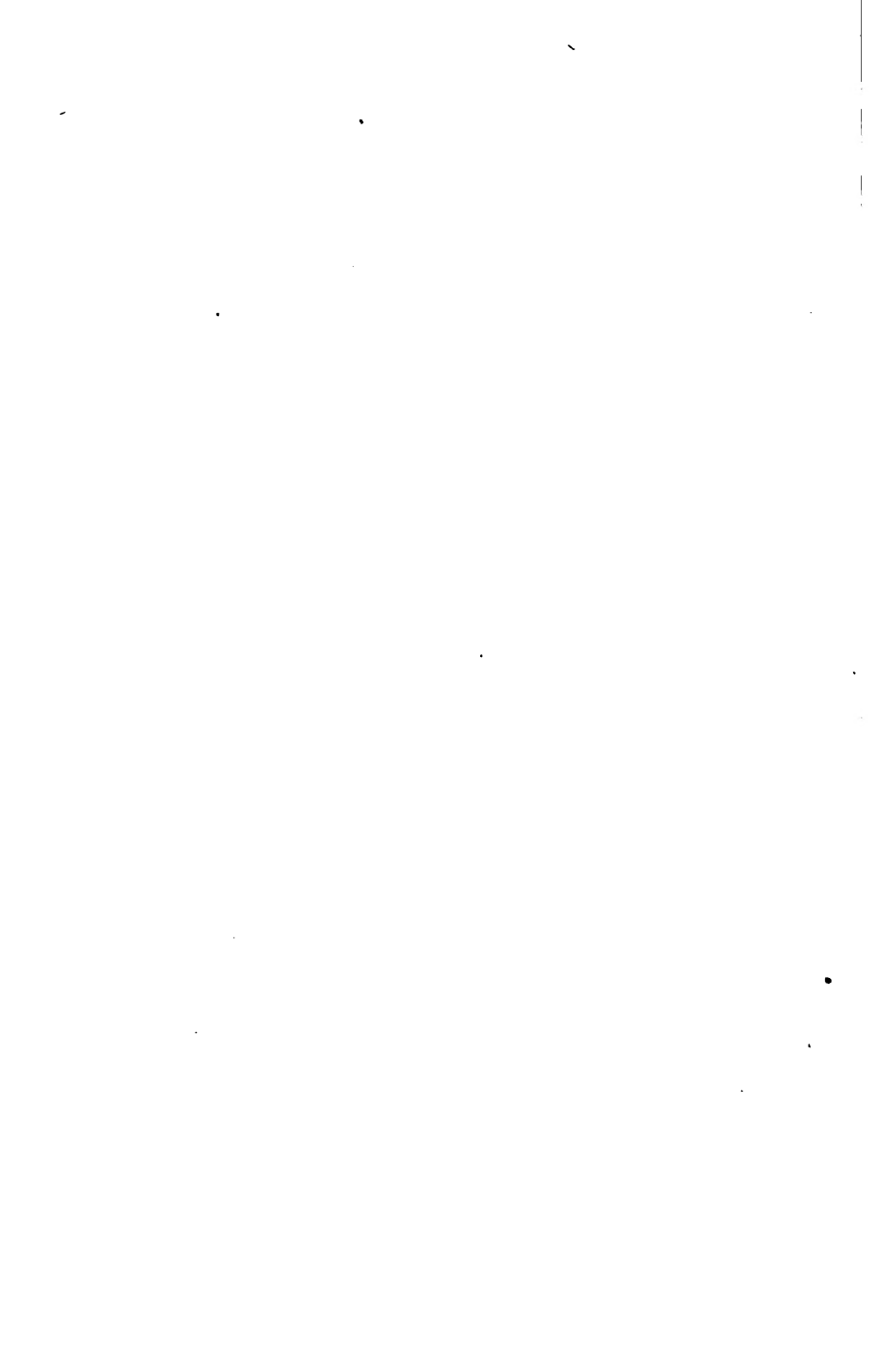
THE BEQUEST OF
WALTER ELA, M.D.
CLASS OF 1871

September 11, 1924

Hannah C. Lyman.







6

MORNING AND EVENING EXERCISES.

FOR
OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER.

BY
WILLIAM JAY.

"Not to know at large of things remote
From use, obscure and subtle, but to know
That which before us lies in daily life,
Is the prime wisdom. What is more is fume,
Emptiness, or fond impertinence;
And renders us, in things that most concern,
Unpractis'd; unprepar'd; and still to seek." MILTON

"Thy word is everlasting truth;
How pure is every page!
That Holy Book shall guide our youth,
And well support our age." WATTS

"The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my
word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the
Lord." JEREMIAH.

NEW-YORK:
ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS, 530 BROADWAY.

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As this is the concluding Volume of these Morning and Evening Exercises, it may not be uninteresting to some of his friends and readers if the Author should remark briefly how a work which has had such an extensive circulation was commenced and completed.

He had passed between Thirty and Forty years of his ministry before he availed himself of a few weeks for an annual relaxation from his stated labours; and when he adopted the plan, these seasons were not with him entire cessations from engagement. Not only did he find the leisure useful to his health and spirits, and affording him opportunities for reflection and preparation for preaching, but he often employed a good portion of it in composition for the press.

Several of his publications were thus begun, and several considerably advanced.

At Sidmouth he began his "Domestic Minister's Assistant," and wrote many of the Family Prayers. In the Isle of Wight he composed "A Charge to a Minister's Wife" and "The Wife's Advocate." At Lynmouth he finished his "Christian Contemplated," and wrote the Preface with "Hints on Preaching."

But this latter place must be a little more noticed. There, for several years successively, he passed a month, the most perfectly agreeable and happy he ever experienced in a life of lovingkindness and tender mercy.

Linton and Lynmouth are nearly connected; the one being at the top and the other at the bottom of a declivity covered with trees and verdure, interspersed with several houses. Linton has been remarked for its sublimity and Lynmouth for its beauty—and their united aspects have been called Switzerland in miniature.

Lynmouth was to the author the most interesting spot. Here two narrow and craggy valleys, obviously once ruptured by a convulsion of nature, terminate; and down these, tumbling from rock to rock, two streams—one running from the East and the other from the South—unite, and then in a small distance empty themselves into the sea.

At the time of his first going there it was hardly known or considered as a watering-place. It had not therefore as yet fallen into the corruptions of such receptacles—nor had the inhabitants been taught to make visitors a prey. The villagers were very respectful; and strangers felt a sense of perfect safety.

Here the Author fixed his residence. He took a whole cottage; it was far from elegant, but it was neat and agreeable; it wanted some accommodation and comforts: but he had what he more prized—rural

and enchanting scenery and solitude—yet not without some to hear the exclamation, “How sweet this solitude is!” For he had society too: his company was small, but chosen, and suitable and improving—

“Where friendship full exerts her softest pow’r,
Perfect esteem, enliven’d by desire
Ineffable, and sympathy of soul,
Thought meeting thought, and will preventing will,
With boundless confidence.”

His associates consisted of his wife and a female friend. It would be vain in him to extol the former; but as to the latter—especially as she was soon removed from our world—he may be allowed to say, we hardly could have had her equal in every thing we wished. She was of a very respectable family; well educated, polished in her manners, intellectual, sprightly, witty, truly pious, full of sensibility and benevolence, and an entire stranger to every thing like selfishness. What, with regard to this friend before our first excursion together, was acquaintance, was now rendered intimacy the most cordial; and she became a dear resident in the family till her lamented death. The cottage we occupied was near Mr. Herries’s beautiful villa. It has since been spoiled by improvements, and is now a kind of tawdry little mansion; and the whole of Lynmouth itself, which taste might have altered and yet left in a village style, is aping a paltry town.

Here our party felt themselves at liberty to meet—or to separate—to read—or to write—or to con-

verse—or to walk, as inclination prompted. As to himself, the Author opened his parlour and spoke on the Sabbath-day evening to any of the neighbours who would attend. But having been struck with the design, and also having been urged to undertake something of the kind, he now began his “Morning Exercises.” Of these, he here often wrote two and sometimes three a day ; and always read one of them in the morning, and another in the evening devotion—and not often without the approbation of his companions, which much excited and encouraged him to proceed.

Here he composed the greater part of these *Morning Exercises*, and here also in after visits he wrote the greater part of the *Evening*. He once thought of distinguishing by a final mark all he had written in this retirement—but not doing it immediately, his recollection soon became too indistinct for him to decide with certainty. The first “Exercise” he wrote was that which is entitled “The Unlonely Solitude,” John xvi. 32: “And shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”

He wished also to have marked those which he wrote as he journeyed to and from Lynmouth. At the “Plume of Feathers,” Minehead, where he slept as he was going down, he composed the Exercise called “The Pious Excursion”—1 Sam. iii. 9: “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth,”—especially in reference to such a journey of recreation. At the same

Inn, as he returned, he composed the Exercise entitled "The Call to depart." Micah ii. 10: "Arise and depart hence, for this is not your rest." He also wrote a third Exercise at the same inn—viz. "Changes in the Wilderness not a removal from it." Numbers x. 12: "And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness at Paran."

The Author cannot conclude without observing two things:—

The First is, That relaxation is never so perfectly enjoyed as in connexion with engagement.

"A want of occupation is not rest;

A mind quite vacant is a mind distress'd."

Relaxation indeed can have no existence separate from employment, for what is there then to relax *from*? On the other hand, action prepares for repose; and labour not only sweetens but justifies recreation—so that we feel it to be, not only innocent indulgence, but a kind of recompence.

The Second is, That, as of such a precious talent as time nothing should be lost; so, much may be done by gathering up its fragments.

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MORNING AND EVENING EXERCISES.

OCTOBER 1.—MORNING.

"Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light."

AMOS v. 18.

WE may apply this to the day of death. How often do men when in trouble and disappointment express a wish that God would now take away their life from them, supposing that it is better for them to die than to live? We cannot, indeed, be always sure of the sincerity of their desire; and they may not be sure of it themselves. Under the pressure of present feeling, they may imagine that death would be welcome; when, perhaps, if it actually appeared they would decline his aid. And if they *would* not they *ought*. For *their* fleeing from trouble, is as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.

Let me, then, beg these sons of sorrow to enquire—Whether the event they long for, will be a real remedy for their complaints. Are they sure that death will be annihilation? are they perfectly sure that there is nothing beyond the grave? Can they prove that there is no future state? or that in this state there is no misery, but happiness only? Judas hanged him-

self. But he went to his own place. This was far worse than his former condition, even under all the horrors of remorse.

If the Scripture be true, *all* are not happy at death. Yea, *none* are then happy without a title to heaven and a meetness for it. And have YOU this title? What is it? "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Have you this meetness? What is it? Do you love holiness? Without this *could* you be happy in a holy place? in a holy state? in holy company? in holy engagements? in holy enjoyments? Is the Redeemer precious to your souls? And do you delight in him? Without this could you be happy, to be for ever in his presence, and hearing for ever his praise? Could a man without an ear or taste for music be happy by being removed into a world of melody and harmony? Need you be told that happiness does not arise from the excellency of the object, but from its adaptation to our disposition? That nothing can make us happy but what relieves our *wants*? fulfils our *desires*? and satisfies our *hope*? Without holiness, therefore, *no* man *can* see the Lord.

How absurd, then, is it to wish to leave this world for another, before you are sure the exchange will be for your advantage! For your advantage it cannot be, if you die unpardoned and unrenewed. Blessed are the dead that die *in the Lord*. But, out of Him, you are out of the city of refuge, and the avenger of blood is upon you. Out of Him, you are out of the Ark, and exposed to the Deluge. No; the day of *your* death is not better than the day of your birth.—Whatever

your privations, and losses, and distresses, here, may be, they are only the beginnings of sorrow; and all you suffer from them is only a drop to the ocean, compared with the damnation of hell.—And once gone from time, there is no return. As the tree falleth, so it lies.

Instead, therefore, of wishing this only and all-important season ended, you should be thankful that it is prolonged, if it be continued even in a vale of tears; and account that the longsuffering of God is your salvation: for he is not willing that any should perish.

Remember also, that these disappointments and sorrows, which make you so impatient, may prove the greatest blessing; and the valley of Achor be given you for a door of hope. For God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. He renders earth desolate to induce you to seek a better country. He strikes away every human prop, and puts failure and vexation into every worldly scheme, that you may turn from idols to the Supreme Good, and say—

“What should I wait or wish for, then,
From creatures—earth and dust?
They make our expectations vain.
And disappoint our trust.

‘Now I forbid my carnal hope,
My fond desires recall;
I give my mortal interest up,
And make my God my all.”

Away, then, with every thought of desperation. Say, “I will arise, and go unto my Father”—He is in sight, waiting to receive thee graciously, and to love thee freely. Repair to the throne of the heavenly grace—

You cannot spread your sorrows *there* in vain. If tempted to despair, try his word. No one ever trusted, and was confounded. Cry, "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." "Come," says the Reliever of every burden—"Come unto me, *all* ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

The Athenian said, "I should have been lost, if I had not been lost." What made the prodigal think of home but want? Where did Manasseh find his father's God but in affliction? We often feel for those who have been reduced; and say, they have seen *better* days—But if in their prosperity they forgot God that made them, and lightly esteemed the Rock of their salvation; and in their adversity have thrown themselves into his arms—these, these are the *best* days they ever saw; and they will draw forth their praise for ever. This, my suffering friend, may be your case—and will be—if you seek unto God, and unto God commit your cause. He can, he will turn the shadow of death into the morning—and you shall join the multitude who are saying, IT IS GOOD FOR ME THAT I HAVE BEEN AFFLICTED.

OCTOBER 1.—EVENING.

"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness."

PSALM xvii. 15.

THIS is the language of a man whose mind is made up; who has decided for himself; who does not suspend his conduct upon the resolution of others. "This is my choice, my hope, my relief, my comfort. If the whole world should go another way, this is mine. I would draw others, I would draw all into the same course, for I know the blessedness of it—

But I dare not be governed by them—As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.”

It is the language of a man rising in life, and with great prospects before him. From a mere shepherd he had become a hero and a conqueror; he had married into the royal family, and knew he was to fill the throne of Israel. All this he overlooks, like a true son of Abraham, who “by faith sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. The sun conceals the stars, not by a diffusion of darkness, but of superior splendour. To one who has looked within the veil, and seen the glory that shall be revealed, what are all earthly honours, riches, and dominion? “Men of the world have their portion in this life—as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.”

It is the language of a Jew. Though the Jews lived under a dispensation abounding with carnal ordinances, some of them were far from being carnal men. Many of the promises addressed to them regarded the life that now is; and they had an obscurer revelation of a future state than we. Our Saviour tells his disciples that many prophets and kings had desired to see the things which they saw, and did not see them; and Paul says that life and immortality were brought to light through the Gospel. But this is to be taken comparatively, and not absolutely. In Judah was God known; his Name was great in Israel. Jacob said, “I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord;” but what salvation could he look for in

death, unless a salvation beyond the grave? Moses "had respect unto the recompence of the reward." And David said, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness."

The source from which he derived his prospect of blessedness was God, in whose presence there is fullness of joy. If we do not make him the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever, we may seek happiness, but we shall never find it. Had a capacity to make us happy been placed in any creature, we should have been necessarily attached to idolatry, by the very law of our being.

The *beholding of God's face* signifies two things. First, the enjoyment of his favour. In the Scripture, to seek his favour is to seek his face: and for God to make his face to shine upon us, is to be gracious unto us. Hence, says David, "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." What can equal the expression of his love? In his favour is life. Secondly, Intimate communion with him. David was so far reconciled to Absalom, as to allow of his return to Jerusalem; but he said, "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face." Angels are represented as "always beholding the face of our heavenly Father." And thus it is said of the glorified saints, "They shall serve him, and they shall see his face." That is, they shall enjoy the most perfect acquaintance and intimacy with him.

Of this beatifical vision we know very little; and very little can we know till the voice cries, "Come and see." But one thing we know—It is the way in

which the blessedness will be realized:—"I shall behold thy face *in righteousness*." Righteousness is not a casual or usual concomitant of the privilege, but an essential requisite to it. It is indispensable in two respects—as to merit or title—and as to meetness or preparation. The former is derived from the righteousness of another, in which Paul wished to be found, and which he calls the righteousness of God by faith; and which is for all and upon all them that believe. The latter is from a righteousness of our own; by which we mean, not that it is ours derivatively, but subjectively, being wrought *in* us by the influence of the Holy Spirit. The one is the righteousness of justification, the other the righteousness of sanctification: the one is a relative change, or the change of our state; the other, a personal change, or the change of our nature. They are very distinguishable from each other; but they are always united, and they are equally necessary. A title to a thing is not a meetness for it: but the Apostle blesses God who had made them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. That can never make us happy which is not adapted to our disposition. We cannot even hope for an object unless we value it and desire it: but our wishes follow our convictions and our feelings. No one longs for the heaven of a Christian but he who is renewed in the spirit of his mind; and he alone is capable of enjoying it—Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Therefore the decision is, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God: without holiness no man shall see the Lord. And the subjects of Divine grace do not feel this a hardship: *they* do not groan, "What a sad thing it is that we cannot go to heaven

unless we are sanctified!" *they* love sanctification, and pray to be delivered from all their iniquities. Suppose a man had the promise of an estate, and was assured he should be put in possession of it as soon as ever he was recovered from sickness, would he, while suffering the effects of his vile and painful disease, say, How lamentable it is that I cannot be put into the enjoyment of my estate till I am well! He would feel that he could not enjoy it while the malady continued; and would long for his health, even for its own sake, if no inheritance followed the invaluable blessing itself.

OCTOBER 2.—MORNING.

"I will hear what God the Lord will speak."

Ps. lxxxv. 8.

AND surely, if *He* speaks, in whatever way he expresses himself, it becomes us to hear, and to hear immediately. Let us not, therefore, "be unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." There are four cases in which we should adopt this resolution.

First. I will hear what God the Lord will speak as to *doctrinal truth*. If error were harmless, we should not be commanded to "buy the truth, and sell it not:" to "prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good." It is of unspeakable importance to have proper sentiments on all religious subjects. But concerning all these subjects different opinions prevail: and it is certain that all these opinions cannot be true. Hence persons are often

perplexed, especially at the beginning of the Christian life. And what in this case are we to do? One cries, Lo! here is Christ; and another, Lo! there. Be it so. We are not left without witness. It would be sad and dangerous had we no rule to go by; no standard to which we could appeal. But we have such an advantage. And in things of moment it is plain and obvious. And it is accessible; it is in our possession; it is the testimony of God, recorded in the Scriptures. I will therefore make no system of divinity, drawn up by fallible creatures like myself, my oracle; but enter at once the temple of Revelation, and inquire there. I will call no man master upon earth—one is my master, even Christ; and all besides are only brethren. I need not ask what Arminius, or Calvin, speaks—they themselves are to be judged out of this Book; and what they deliver is no further binding upon me than as *they* can say, "Thus saith the Lord." "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." In this inspired Volume I have the judgment of God himself upon every subject with which it is necessary for me to be acquainted. And I will go to it; not with a previous bias, but open to conviction; not to dictate, but to learn. I will not be influenced to embrace a doctrine, because it is easy of comprehension; or to reject it because it is mysterious—It is infinitely reasonable to believe *whatever* God speaks; and my only concern is to ascertain what he *has* spoken.

Secondly. I will hear what God the Lord will speak, as to my movements in life. How ignorant

and shortsighted are we! How liable to mistake! How incapable of distinguishing between appearances and realities; and of deciding what will be good or evil for us eventually! Surely we have erred and suffered enough already, to convince us that "the way of man is not in himself." How much depends on one wrong step, as it regards our comfort, usefulness, and reputation! Even when the iniquity is pardoned, the natural consequences may long operate. They often cannot be remedied; and so repentance is quartered upon the offender all his days. How frequently has this been exemplified in irreligious marriages; and changes of residence and business, through fancy, pride, or avarice; or even good, but mistaken motives! A Christian, therefore, should take every step of importance—and what step may not be important?—feeling a responsibility that makes him tremble; and an anxiety that urges him to seek counsel from above—"I will hear what God the Lord will speak"—and regulate my marches by the cloud. But while I wait upon God, I must also wait for him; and integrity and uprightness are to preserve me while I do so. For he tells me, that if a man sets up idols in his heart, and comes to inquire of him, he will answer him, but "according to his idols." And this is done, not only by a penal influence; but by a natural effect: for every thing will be coloured according to the passion through which I view it. If, therefore, I do not consult God sincerely, it would be better for me not to do it at all: for it can only dishonour him and delude myself. But if I go in simplicity, and say, "Lord, what wilt thou

have me do?" I come within reach of the promise, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Thirdly. I will hear what God the Lord will speak, as to the *dispensations of his providence*. Nothing is more trying than what an old Divine calls "a dumb affliction:" so that when we put our ear to it, we can seem to hear nothing, as to what it implies, or intends. Varying the metaphor a little, Job was in such a state of ignorance and perplexity: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." In such a condition, it affords relief to be able to add: "but *he* knoweth the way that I take." Yet duty requires that *we* should have some knowledge of it ourselves. A natural man is only concerned to escape from trouble: but the Christian is anxious to have it sanctified and improved. He is commanded to hear the rod. While God chastens, he teaches. I must therefore be in a learning frame of mind. I must say unto God, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me"—"I will hear what, by this event, God the Lord will speak."

Fourthly. I will hear what he will say, also, in *answer to prayer*. Here is a thing, I fear, generally disregarded. How many petitions are never thought of after they have been delivered! We knock at the door, and go away, and never even look back to see whether it be opened. Can we expect that God will attend to those prayers which we condemn ourselves? Are such addresses any thing better than a mockery of the Supreme Being?

Let us therefore hear what he says in reply to our requests. Is it not pleasing to know that we are not forsaken nor forgotten of our best Friend? To be able to rectify a gloomy conclusion? To reason from the past to the future? And like a beggar, to derive encouragement from success? "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless, thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee." "I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: but verily, God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me." "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice, and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live."

OCTOBER 2.—EVENING.

"And he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?"

LUKE iv. 21, 22.

THIS is all we have of his wonderful sermon at Nazareth. And who can fill up the outline? But while we want the matchlessness of his own exemplification, we have the text and are able to discern something of the truth and force of the words in their bearing on him who spake as never man spake—"And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the

book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

It is useless to inquire, because it is impossible to determine, whether this scripture was one of the appointed lessons for the day, or whether he chose it purposely for the occasion, or whether it was the first passage that presented itself to his eye when he unfolded the roll. But he asserts his qualification for his work and the design of his office. His mission was all mercy. He came not to condemn the world, but to seek and to save that which was lost. The statement more than implies the fallen, perishing condition of mankind. The truth of the humiliating fact is the dark ground on which alone the glory of the Gospel can be displayed to advantage. If we deny it, the Gospel has nothing to do with us, and we shall have little to do with the Gospel. But happy are they, however painful the conviction, who feel that they are in the state of wretchedness which the Gospel is intended to relieve. To them it will be *indeed* glad tidings. They will see that it is every way suitable to their woes and wants, and entirely adequate to their relief.

Draw near, and lay open your complaints. Are you "poor"? Envy not those who have an abundance of this world's goods. Let not your privations induce you to murmur or despair. You may be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. The poor

have the Gospel preached unto them: and if you receive the message, it will bless your bread and your water; it will turn your humble dwelling into a heavenly place; it will fill you with all the fulness of God—"He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor."

Are you "broken-hearted"? pressed down, crushed with fear and sorrow, arising from a sense of sin and guilt? A wounded spirit who can bear? But he healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up all their wounds. In other cases, people are said to die of a broken heart; but here they will only die of a whole one. He is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit—"He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted."

Are you enslaved? There is no bondage like the bondage of corruption: no vassalage like the slavery of the soul under the dominion of sin, and when taken captive by the devil at his will. Have you felt the degradation and misery, and do you sigh for deliverance? Turn, ye prisoners of hope, to him who can make you free indeed—He is sent 'to preach deliverance to the captives."

Are you "blind" as well as bound? This was the case with Samson and Zedekiah; their oppressors having put out their eyes. We have known persons deprived of bodily sight who were able to see clearly the things of God: but multitudes who have corporeal vision are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. They see no beauty nor comeliness in him who is fairer than the children of men.

But he can open the eyes of the understanding, and make us wise unto salvation—He is sent “for the recovering of sight to the blind.”

Are you not only bound, and blind, but “bruised”? Here is no tautology or excess—every word adds to the picture. Joseph’s feet were hurt with fetters; he was “laid in irons.” The magistrates commanded Paul and Silas to be “beaten;” and they were not only cast into prison, but “had many stripes laid upon them.” Who can describe the injuries and sufferings of sinners! But he “sets at liberty them that are bruised.”

Or are you in the condition of any or of all those among the Jews who were compassionated by the Jubilee, which returned every fiftieth year; when silver trumpets proclaimed through the land, “Ye servants, you are now free from your masters. Ye debtors, you are now discharged from your creditors. Ye forfeiters of your estates, you have now your inheritances restored?” How would such an announcement be longed for—how “acceptable” would such a season prove to all who were to be relieved and enriched! “Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound”—He preaches “the acceptable year of the Lord.” The whole continuance of this dispensation, however, is only *a year*—and each of you has only *a day* of it—“Behold, now is the accepted time; Behold, now is the day of salvation.”

What effect has this discourse upon the audience? They were struck with admiration. But it is feared with nothing else.—“All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.—And they said, Is not this Joseph’s son?” They seem not firmly to have believed his

declarations, or seriously to have considered his doctrine, or to have received the love of the truth that they might be saved. If they had convictions, they were ineffectual ones; or if their feelings were excited, they were overpowered by their vain and worldly prejudices and passions: and therefore they begin cavilling, not indeed at his teaching, but at the meanness of his extraction. "Have we not lately seen him labouring like one of us? Are we to bow to *his* authority?"

"Lord, what is man!" How are the best means and opportunities rendered useless! Is it strange if modern ministers should complain of the want of acceptance and success, when even he could say, "I have spent my strength in vain?"

Yet we sometimes hope, though outnumbered by a vile majority whose astonishment soon issued in malignity, a few admired from other and better principles, and were ready to lift up their voice and cry, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked." So must it be with us, if we would not "wonder and perish." How glorious his person! How Divine his condescension! How full of grace and truth! We must love him. We must confide in him. We must apply to him for every purpose he is appointed to accomplish. We must feel the tendency of every view we take of his character, changing us into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth are enough to relieve every perplexity, to banish every fear, to surpass every hope, and to fill us with joy unspeakable, and full of glory—But they

cannot profit, unless they are mixed with faith in those that hear them.

OCTOBER 3.—MORNING.

"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."
PHIL. iv. 5.

—WHAT moderation? Moderation with regard to your appetites. Some make a god of their belly, and glory in their shame. Many indulge in eating and drinking, beyond the demands of bodily refreshment, or the allowances of health.—Your moderation with regard to your passions. You are to be angry and sin not. The sun must not go down upon your wrath. The fear, the joy, the love, the grief, allowable in themselves, may become excessive in the degree.—Your moderation with regard to the distinctions of life. These are to differ from "the pride of life,"—in apparel, in furniture, in servants.—Your moderation in professional pursuits, and the cares of trade—diligent in business, but not "entangling yourselves in the affairs of this life;" content with sober and solid gain; and not, by hazard and speculations, making haste to be rich.—Your moderation in the exaction of rights; whether pecuniary—in declining the rigour of the law, for debt; or personal—in waiving the claims of authority and preference, as Abraham did in the case of Lot.—Your moderation in your opinions and zeal. Many things in religion are of far less importance than others, even if true—But even the truth of them is not easily ascertained; and we see men of equal talent and piety on each side of the question. The truth generally lies in the middle;

and he is commonly nearest to it who is abused by both the opposite parties.

And what a reason is there to enforce this admonition!—"The Lord is at hand." The word signifies nigh, either as to place or time. If we take it as to place, it refers to his presence—I am a God at hand, and not afar off. He is about our path and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways. Thus he is always nigh to see and observe, to aid or oppose, to bless or to punish.

—If we take it as to time—it refers to his coming—"The coming of the Lord drawing near." This is true, not only as to the certainty of the event, and the confidence of faith; but as to his real approach. If the Lord was at hand when Paul wrote this Epistle, how much more since near two thousand years have rolled away! But he comes by death—And this, as to consequence, is the same to us, as his coming to judgment. And there is but a step between us and death.

If a multitude of people were assembled together, and behaved tumultuously, and the king was coming along the road—"The king is at hand," would instantly reduce them to order and silence; and every eye would be turned towards *him*. If a number of criminals, forgetful of their condition, were improperly amusing themselves, or striving together, and a signal told them, the judge was entering the town to try them, what an effect would this instantly have upon their mind and their conduct! But what is your case? He is not only your Sovereign, but your Judge—And "behold, the Judge **STANDETH BEFORE THE DOOR!**"

How lamentable is it, that to enforce what is wise,

and just, and good, in itself, we should need such motives! And how sad is it, that these motives, after all, should have so little influence over us! That we should be constantly reminded of such a Being—led back to the grace of his first coming—and forward, to the glory of his second coming—and think, and feel, and speak, and act, and live, as we do! “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

OCTOBER 3.—EVENING.

“Upholding all things by the word of his power.” HEB. 1. 3.

THIS is unquestionably spoken of the Lord Jesus. It shews us what is the nature and condition of creatures: they cannot subsist without support. They can no more of themselves continue in existence than they could give themselves life. In him they live, move, and have their being. “Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.” Preservation therefore is a Divine word; and in a sense it is a continued creation. Yet he is equal to this; *he* does it; and observe—

The extent of his sustentation. He upholds “all things.” This takes in nothing less than our earth and the multitudes of beings attached to it. And what myriads of these are there! And the eyes of all wait upon him; and he openeth his hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Yet what is our earth, compared with the immensity of space? And what is the aggregate of creatures adhering to this molehill globe, to the inhabitants of *all* other regions in the universe? Yet all—every worm—and

every world, is from him—and by him all things consist.

And see the ease and efficiency of his agency. He upholdeth all things "by the word of his power." A man, however powerful, can do but little. A complication of concerns perplexes and bewilders him. The exertion of a few hours wearies and exhausts him. Impose upon him an increase of burden, and he founders and sinks. But "is any thing too hard for the Lord?" "If it be marvellous in your eyes, should it be marvellous in mine eyes, saith the Lord?" Rulers accomplish their wishes without moving: they can act by an order. The centurion was only an inferior officer: yet he could say to one of the soldiers under him, Go, and he went; to another, Come, and he came; and to his servant, Do this, and he did it. And he spake this in reference to the Lord Jesus with regard to a particular case, and to shew his confidence in his powerfulness—that disorders come and go at his bidding. We read that "he sent his word and healed them;" that is, he commanded the cure, and thereby produced it. "At my rebuke," says he, "I dry up the sea." "He rebuked," it is said, "the winds and the waves, and there was a great calm." With the same facility and majesty he made the world—"He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." "He said, Let there be light, and there was light." So will it be hereafter with all the millions of the dead: "all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth."

What difficulty, then, can lie in his way? Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain. It is only for him to speak,

and the heathens shall cast their idols to the moles and to the bats, and Mahometanism shall perish, and the Jew look upon him whom he has pierced and mourn, and the man of sin be destroyed, and in the churches of the faithful every plant which our heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up—"And he that sitteth upon the throne saith, Behold, I make all things new."

And is this spoken of him who lay in the manger and died upon the cross? Can he then be any thing less than "the Lord of life and glory," "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"?

It is this that displays and magnifies his condescension. His greatness was unsearchable: but he made himself of no reputation. Widows ministered to him of their substance. "Ye know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich."

OCTOBER 4.—MORNING.

"The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." PROV. iv. 18.

WHAT does this fine image imply? What does it express? Solomon traces the resemblance between the path of the just and the rising light, in three articles. Each *shines*. Each *shines more and more*. Each *shines more and more unto the perfect day*.

The rising light *shines*. It is the very nature of it to do so. It thus shews itself, and renders other

things visible: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Without this, the works of the field, and the human face divine, would be all a blank. But the shining of the light lays open their beauties, and fills us with admiration and praise. Thus the Christian's path breaks out of obscurity; the darkness is past; and the true light shineth. His religion is not only real, but apparent. And as it need not, and should not, be hid; so it will not, and can not, be hid. Its operation will evince its existence. Its principles will display themselves in its practice. There will be the work of faith, and the labor of love, and the patience of hope, and the fruit of the Spirit. Pity will get into the eye. Meekness will smile in the features. The law of kindness will dwell upon the tongue. The hand, ready to communicate, will unawares slide into the pocket—They that were in darkness will shew themselves; and, in a thousand ways, their light will shine before men.

But the *shining* of the rising light is noble and glorious. It is one of the most splendid appearances in nature. The rising sun is a bridegroom coming out of his chamber. We hardly wonder the poor heathen, in the absence of Revelation, should worship it. The lustre is often too powerful for the naked eye. And how was it with Moses, after communion with God? His face shone, so that the Israelites could not stedfastly behold the glory of his countenance. He was not aware of it himself, till, seeing the people dazzled, he was obliged to take a veil. And the humility of the Christian may keep him from perceiving his own excellences; but others will take knowledge of them: and his profiting will appear

unto all men. And nothing is so impressive and influential as the life of a Christian, when he walks worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called. It was not necessary for the first believers at Jerusalem to lay down rules, to exclude improper characters from their communion—Their purity, their dignity, their majesty repelled them—"And of the rest durst no man join himself to them; but all the people magnified them."

Yet the *shining* of the rising light is not mere lustre. It is a source of usefulness, as well as of admiration. It warms and enlivens. It fertilizes the gardens and the fields. It makes the valleys to stand thick with corn, and the little hills to rejoice on every side. And so Jesus went about doing good. And so Christians are blessings in all the places wherein they move. Let us make this image our model in our endeavours to serve our generation. The sun says nothing—It does good without noise—It shines unasked, constantly, impartially—It rises on the evil, as well as on the good—So may we be merciful.

But the shining light shines *more and more*. So does the path of the just. His religion is a gradual and progressive thing. We therefore read of growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. Of the Thessalonians it is said, Their faith grew exceedingly; and the love of every one of them towards each other abounded. As far as we are stationary in our attainments, we are censured and condemned by the image. But to derive comfort from it, it is not necessary that we should be every thing at once. Nothing in nature reaches its perfection

suddenly. The babe proceeds, by slow degrees, into the man. The blade precedes the full corn in the ear. Let us not despise the day of small things. What was the oak once but an acorn? What is the dawn to the noon?

But the shining light shines more and more *unto the perfect day*. The allusion is not taken from a meteor, that blazes for a moment, and then disappears. Nor from the morning cloud and early dew that soon passeth away: but from the rising sun, that always attains its end, and completes what it begins—rising upwards—and shining—onwards—till it is day—perfect day.

When did the sun ever make a dawn, and not carry it into full day? Who can drive him back, or stop his course? If it had enemies, and they cursed its beams, the rage would be as vain as it would be unreasonable—"He rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." So shall it be with all those who are set in motion for eternity by divine grace. "They that love Him shall be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." There is no enchantment or divination against them. In all opposition they shall be more than conquerors. He who is the Author shall also be the Finisher of their faith. They shall soon lose all their infirmities. They shall emerge into perfect knowledge, holiness, and joy—And "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. **HE THAT HATH EARS TO HEAR LET HIM HEAR.**"

Who can help recalling the beautiful lines of Dr

Watts, which, though written for the infant mind, are worthy the perusal of angels?

"How fine has the day been, how bright was the sun,
How lovely and joyful the course that he run;
Though he rose in a mist when his race he begun,
And there followed some droppings of rain!
But, now the fair traveller's come to the west,
His rays are all gold, and his beauties are best;
He paints the sky gay, as he sinks to his rest,
And foretells a bright rising again.

"Just such is the Christian. His course he begins,
Like the sun in a mist while he mourns for his sins
And melts into tears; then he breaks out and shines,
And travels his heavenly way:
But when he comes nearer to finish his race,
Like a fine setting sun, he looks richer in grace,
And gives a sure hope, at the end of his days,
Of rising in brighter array."

OCTOBER 4.—EVENING:

"Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" 2 SAM. XVI. 17.

THIS was the inquiry or complaint of Absalom, addressed to Hushai, because he went not with him. Let us transfer it to a nobler Being, and apply it to a juster occasion.

Jesus sustains the character here expressed, towards all his people. He gives them numberless proofs of a friendship the most sincere, efficient, faithful, durable, and disinterested: he is "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." But they often act towards him in a manner very unbecoming the relation, and induce him to ask, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?"

It will be allowed that we can never discharge the

obligations we owe him. We must lie for ever under the burden : but the "burden is light." Nothing is more painful than to be obliged to an enemy ; but we feel otherwise when favoured by a benefactor we much regard and esteem. If I could save myself ; if I could renew, keep, and glorify myself, I would infinitely rather my Lord and Saviour accomplished it ; as it would show his love for me, and his presence with me ; and I should endlessly feel myself indebted to him, and say, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain. But though we cannot discharge our obligations, we ought to be sensible of them, and evince that we are willing to make him suitable returns, and, like the woman in the Gospel, to do what we can.

But here, alas ! he is often disappointed. He cannot indeed be disappointed as to fact, because his understanding is infinite ; but he can be disappointed as to right. Surely he has a right to expect a certain kind of conduct from those he has so indulged ; and not meeting with it, he has surely reason to complain—and he *does* complain. "What more," says he, speaking of the Jewish church, "could have been done for my vineyard, and I have not done it ? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes ?" And, speaking of the same people under the emblem of a fig tree, "These three years," says he, "I come seeking fruit, and find none."

Surely, as our friend, he has a right to expect that we should readily obey him. If ye love me, keep my commandments. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. And as none of these commandments are unreasonable or unprofitable, and as they afford expressions of our at-

tachment to him, they ought not to be grievous. But have we never drawn back? or turned aside? or been partial, or reluctant in duty? Have we always asked, with Saul of Tarsus, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" or resolved, with Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth"?

Surely, as our friend, he has a right to expect that we should own him, speak well of his Name, and recommend him to others. Have we sought his glory? Have we laboured to advance his cause in the world? Have we endeavoured to make him known and endeared in the circle of our own connexions? Have we not in some companies blushed to have discovered what we profess to believe? Have we not been ashamed of him and of his words? He, though passed into the heavens, is not ashamed to call us brethren before angels; yet have we not denied him before men?

Surely, as our friend, he has a right to expect that we should credit his word. We cannot offer a greater indignity to another than to disbelieve his declarations. The affront would be aggravated if he was a person remarkable for veracity, and we ourselves had always seen nothing in him but truth and faithfulness. But suppose he had added an oath (which ends all strife) to his promises? By disbelieving him *then*, we should charge him not only with falsehood, but perjury. And is not this applicable to us? How should we tremble at the nature and consequences of unbelief! Ah! my Lord, I hear thee saying, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Yes; I have not only contradicted thee—I have not only given thee the lie—but made thee to forswear thyself; and I cry out with tears, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!"

As our friend, he expects that we should lay aside formality and reserve—that we should treat him with freedom and openness—that we should feel it not a task but a pleasure to come to his house—that we should never be afraid of offending him by the largeness of our applications, or wearying him by the frequency of our importunities. For he has commanded us to come boldly to the throne of grace; in every thing to make known our requests; to open our mouths wide; to ask and receive, that our joy may be full. But though we are not straitened in him, how straitened are we in ourselves! How cold, and distant, and suspicious, and fearful, often is our intercourse with him! How little do we honour him by our confidence!

As our friend, he expects that we regard his connexions. "Is there any left of the house of Saul," said David, "that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Jesus has brethren and sisters on earth, who are afflicted and poor, and feel all the exigencies of life. But we may ask, "Since they are so nearly related to him, why does he permit their want and distress?" It is partly for our sakes. He deposes them to live among us, to receive the tokens of our attachment to himself. We cannot sigh for opportunities to testify our regard, by saying, "Oh, if he were in the world again as he once was, how would I minister unto him! how would I open my doors and entertain him!"—For he is in the world. The poor we have always with us. What we do unto one of the least of these his brethren, we do it unto him.

As our friend, if he has left us a memento to recall him to our minds, he expects that we should prize

and observe it. Have we ever closed the eyes of a much-loved connexion, and have we in our possession a picture of him? How much do we value, and how often do we contemplate the inanimate shadow! But suppose the painting should represent him in the attitude of dying, and dying *for us*, while endeavouring to save us from fire, or water, or the stroke of the murderer—What is his own supper but such a likeness? Does it not shew forth his death? Is he not before our eyes, evidently set forth crucified among us, and sacrificed for us? Do this, he said, in remembrance of me. And can we undervalue it? Can we neglect it? Neglect it constantly? Neglect it often? Is this thy kindness to thy friend?

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Let us not be unwilling to receive the rebuke. It is indeed humbling; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Let us learn to demean ourselves towards him in future more properly. Let us watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. Let us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord. Let us look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn. Let us grieve that he is wounded in the house of his friends. Above all, let us grieve that we ourselves ever grieved his Holy Spirit. Indeed, if I am his, and in a proper state of mind, nothing will affect me like this—"I have acted an unworthy, an ungrateful part"—I have sinned against my best friend—

"Sure, were not I most vile and base,
I could not thus my friend requite;
And were not he the God of grace,
He'd frown and spurn me from his sight"

OCTOBER 5.—MORNING.

"Who is gone into heaven." 1 PET. iii. 22.

MANY had gone there before. Abel was the first that entered; and it is encouraging to think, that the first victim of death was a partaker of glory. Human nature was found in heaven before it was seen in hell. How long he was alone there we know not. But others soon followed; and our Saviour must have found there a multitude which no man could number..

But though many had gone into heaven before, none of them had gone in the same way and manner with himself. Others had entered without their bodies; but he had entered incarnately. Two had indeed entered embodied; but they did not take their bodies from the grave. Enoch and Elias died not, but were only changed. Jesus died, and was buried; and passed to glory from the tomb. Others entered heaven by mere favour, presenting no claim from their worthiness and obedience: but he entered by merit—He deserved all the glory he obtained: it was no more than the reward of his doing and suffering. Others entered as private individuals; and their entering did not insure the entrance of others—not even of their friends and relations. Religion is a personal thing: and it could not be inferred that because the husband or the father was glorified, the wife or child would follow. But he entered as a public character, as the Head and Representative of his people: and because he lives, they shall live also. Hence says the Apostle, "He

hath quickened us together with Christ, and raised us up, and made us sit together with him in the heavenly places."

It is expedient for us, therefore, that he went away: and as Joseph's going from the prison to the palace was not only his own advancement, but the salvation of his father's house, so Jesus is gone into heaven, not only to be crowned with glory and honour, but to execute the remainder of his mediatorial work on behalf of the redeemed. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." But did he not say when he expired, "It is finished"? He did—and it *was* finished—and nothing could be *added* to it. But *what* was finished? The procuring of salvation only—not the application of it. The former was done upon the cross: the latter is done upon the throne. What he suffered to acquire, he is exalted to bestow. He is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour; to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Even in his priestly character it behoved him not only to suffer, but to enter into his glory. The Apostle therefore says, If he were on earth, he could not be a priest; because he could then only have fulfilled one part of the office. For the high priest not only offered the sacrifice, but entered the holy place—and sprinkled the blood upon the mercy-seat—and burned incense—and made intercession for the people. Jesus, therefore, after dying for us, entered into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us. By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained

eternal redemption for us—"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

Here he fought, and overcame. But the Conqueror must have his triumph. He must display his spoils, and enrich the multitude. He therefore ascended on high, leading captivity captive, and received gifts for men, even for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

He was a prophet, by his own preaching. But how local, how confined, and unsuccessful, was his personal ministry! The work was to be done by another ministry. Corporeally, he was to withdraw: "But," said he, "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my Name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." "I have yet many things to say unto you: but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." Thus he considered his personal presence and agency far inferior to the dispensation of the Spirit. And yet some are looking for his bodily advent again, as if this was to effect what the Holy Ghost could not accomplish. What purpose is to be executed in the spread of the Gospel? or the conversion of souls? or the glorifi-

cation of the Church? to which the energy of the Spirit is not adequate? Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.—Were he here in his body, he would be confined to one place at a time; and many would envy the honour of seeing him in vain. But, in his Spirit, he can be everywhere, and enjoyed of all, at once.

OCTOBER 5.—EVENING.

“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also.” ACTS xii. 1, 2, 3.

PERSECUTION is a thing of which we happily know very little from experience. We are a sinful people, but, blessed be God, persecution is not a national crime with us; yea, it is even punishable; and conscientiousness is placed under legal protection. But while we rejoice in our privileges, and pray that God would preserve and prosper a country in which we sit under our own vine and fig-tree, and none can make us afraid, we do well to call to remembrance the former times, in which others endured a great fight of afflictions.—Four things are remarked concerning the persecution before us.

First, the season—“Now about *that* time”—What time? When, as we see from the conclusion of the preceding chapter, a great dearth prevailed throughout all the world, in the days of Claudius Cæsar. Every public calamity is a judgment for sin, and calls men to repentance. But it is dreadful when the design of Providence is frustrated, and men go on in

their trespasses, and, instead of returning to him that smiteth them, sin more and more against God. Yet so it was here. God's hand was lifted up, but they would not see: and while famine was stalking among them, and they had cleanness of teeth in all their borders, they are fighting against God, in the guilty and cruel business of persecution.

Secondly, the author—"Herod the king." Not the Herod under whom our Saviour was born: nor Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, who beheaded John: but Herod Agrippa, father of the king Agrippa whom Paul almost persuaded to be a Christian. We know but little of him; and that little only shews his villainess. He reigned seven or eight years, and then departed disgracefully to meet a Being who will have a dreadful account to settle with tyrants and persecutors. Such wretches seldom die a timely and natural death. Here is the end of this child of the devil and enemy of all righteousness: "Upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost."

Thirdly, the victims. Some of them are only adverted to—He stretched forth his hands to vex "certain of the Church:" and nothing more is said of them. We have the names of many of the sufferers for Christ, together with some of their dying words, and letters, and works, and which savour fragrantly of the prison; but a very large portion of the noble army of martyrs are unnoticed in the an-

nals of history. They are indeed recorded in the book of life, and Jesus will confess them before his Father and the holy angels: but they were driven into exile, or pined away by disease, in their dungeons, or were secretly dispatched, a spectacle to angels, but not to the world and to men. One of these victims however is here named. "He killed *James* the brother of John with the sword." James was a preacher. In the Church of God the post of honour has always been the post of danger: and he was the more likely to be laid hold of, as he was one of the two apostles called Boanerges, or sons of thunder, because they were rousing, bold, and fearless in their manner. He was also one of the two who wished to call for fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans, and would thus have been (Lord, what is man!) a persecutor himself: but "Jesus rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: for the Son of man is come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." He was also one of the two sons of Zebedee, who persuaded their mother to desire a certain thing of our Lord: "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom." But Jesus answered, "Ye know not what ye ask: are ye able to drink of the cup I drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them: Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with"—Looking forward in spirit at that very moment, and seeing John banished to the Isle of Patmos, and James beheaded of Herod!

Fourthly, the continuance—"And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also." And did it please the Jews? Then were they equally guilty. They who connive at the wickedness of others—who excite and encourage it, and feel a satisfaction in it, have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and are partakers of other men's sins—Yea, according to the Apostles, they are the most criminal "who take pleasure in them that do such things." The perpetrators may be strongly tempted, but the beholders can plead no such excuse; their delight shews congeniality with the wickedness itself.

But here we see how alive men are to the opinion and applause of their fellow-creatures. Even the great can inhale incense from the vulgar: and even the wise are not senseless to the flattery of fools. What enemies are men to men! How they influence and corrupt one another! Alone, the individual feels well; and resolves; and abides by his resolution—till he gets into company. Alone, he feels the evidence of truth—Why then does he not hear it, follow it, avow it? A frown, a sneer, a laugh, a name! Did Felix think the Apostle deserving imprisonment? No. "But, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, he left Paul bound." Why did not many among the Pharisees believe on him whose miracles they could not deny? They *did* believe on him, but "feared to confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Let us learn to act from principle; and dare to be singular if the course of duty demands it. Let this

desire of approbation turn us towards God. Let us seek to please him. The attempt will involve us in no mean compliances; and it will be sure to succeed.

We also see how, in a bad course, men proceed from evil to evil, and wax worse and worse. One sin renders another necessary, or prepares the way for it. And renders it easier. Let us guard against beginnings. Let us crush the egg before it becomes a fiery flying serpent. "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" — "He proceeded to take Peter also."

OCTOBER 6.—MORNING.

"I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." Pa. xix. 12.

So life was viewed and felt by David. He was very superior to many of his ancestors. He had wealth, and power, and honour, and reigned the greatest monarch of the East. But no condition can make the heir of immortality a citizen here. Others are strangers and sojourners, as to the transitoriness of their continuance in this world, and the certainty of their removal from it; but not as to their disposition. They mind earthly things: and would be glad to live here always. But the child of God is, in principle, what he is in fact; and in experience, what he is in destination. He is also born from above. and bound for glory. And though he is detained here in a foreign land for awhile, for the discharge and the management of certain duties and interests,

yet he thinks, even while thus engaged, of leaving it, in due time, for his own country—where his best relations reside—where lies his inheritance—and where he is to dwell for ever.

“There is my house, my portion fair ;
My kindred and my friends are there,
And my abiding home :
For me my elder brethren stay,
And angels beckon me away,
And Jesus bids me come.”

Am *I* a stranger and a sojourner with God? Let me realize, let me exemplify, the condition. Let me look for the treatment such characters commonly meet with. Like widows and orphans, they are often imposed upon, and wronged and injured. They are turned into ridicule and reproach, because of their speech, their dress, their manners, their usages. And Christians are a peculiar people. They are men wondered at. The Saviour tells them not to marvel if the world hates them; for they are not of the world, even as he is not of the world. This treatment is in reality a privilege, rather than a matter of complaint. It is when I am admired and caressed, and I find every thing agreeable in my circumstances; it is then I feel something of the *settler*. But the disadvantages of my state make me think of home. These induce me to arise, and depart hence, because this is not my rest.

And, surely, if any of my own nation be near me, I shall be intimate with them. We all know the heart of strangers. We all feel the same preferences. The same hope inspires us. The same end unites us. We shall speak often one to another. We shall contrast our present with our future condition. We

shall inquire when we heard from home, and when we think of departing for it; and thus beguile the hours, and relieve the absence.

And let me not be entangled in the affairs of this life. Let me keep myself as detached as possible from things which do not concern me. Let me not embarrass myself as an intermeddler and busy-body in other men's matters. But let me study to be quiet, and to do my own business. Let me pray for the peace of the country through which I am passing. And be thankful for every advantage I enjoy in my temporary exile.

And let my affection be set on things that are above, and my conversation be always in heaven. Let me be—not impatient for home; but prizing it; and longing for it; and judging of myself by my relation to it. Who has not joined in the proverbial sentiment, "Home is home, however homely!" We read of some Swiss soldiers on foreign service, who were so affected with a song that vividly recalled to mind their native valleys, and the houses in which they were born, that the officers were obliged to forbid the use of it. But oh! my Father's house! Here toil; there rest. Here trouble; there joy and gladness. Here darkness; there light. Here sin; there spotless purity. Here the tents of Mesech and Kedar; there the spirits of just men made perfect, and the innumerable company of angels, and the Lord of all. "With such views," says Dr. Goodwin, "let who will be miserable, I will not—I cannot."

OCTOBER 6.—EVENING.

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus."

HEB. xii. 1, 2.

THE language is allusive; and, in the style of the Apostle, the comparison is familiar. As one of the games, celebrated with so much pomp among the Grecians, was running a race, he often borrows an idea from it, to express in a measure the nature of the Christian life. It is a "race." It is needless to multiply articles of resemblance. It is easy to see the impression Paul would make: no prize without running; no heaven without diligence and zeal. Religion demands the full exertion of all our spiritual powers, and allows of no indolence, no repose. Whatever view we take of it; whether as it regards our principles or our conduct, what we have to abolish or establish, to avoid or to pursue; or whether as it includes the duties we owe to God, our fellow-creatures, and ourselves;—it must appear a very active, laborious, and trying scene. It is a disgrace to the character of a Christian, and a contradiction to his profession, not only to turn aside or draw back, but to stand still, or look back, or even seem to come short. Advancement is not more obviously implied in the accomplishment of a race, than progression is necessary in a course of godliness. We are therefore required to grow in grace. And Paul, exemplifying in his experience what he recommends in doctrine, says, "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

This race is "set before us"—It is prescribed, marked out, made evident in the Scripture. It is not a concern into which we drop by chance; neither is it a course of our own devising. Religion is not will-worship, human inventions, the traditions and commandments of men. No authority is binding here but Divine. We have always one question only to ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And he has in his word made things plain, in proportion as they are important, so that the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein, and he may run that readeth. He has also set before us the difficulties attached to this course, so that if we suffer we have no reason to complain. If, when we meet with them, we are tempted to despond or decline, we may say, O my soul, ought I to be surprised? Am I deceived? When I gave in my unworthy name to become his follower, did he hide any thing for me? Did he not assure me that in the world I should have tribulation? Did he not say, if any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me?

This race set before us is to be "run with patience." We shall constantly need this grace. We shall meet with provocations and injuries; and we are not to revenge ourselves, or even render railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing. We shall suffer afflictions of various kinds and degrees; and we are not to murmur and repine, but in patience to possess ourselves, and to pray for all longsuffering with joyfulness. We may be exercised with delays; and these will often be peculiarly trying, for hope deferred maketh the heart sick. God hides his face. Prayer seems unnoticed. The promise appears gone for

evermore. We have little success in our spiritual warfare. Iniquities prevail against us in the sense of their guilt and the feeling of their power. The way is long. Heaven looks at an awful distance, and seems to advance from us as we advance. Without are fightings, and within are fears—But we must persevere, and “by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality.” It is not the first, but the last step in the race that brings the candidate to the goal. He only that endureth to the end shall be saved.

This race set before us we are thus to run with patience, “looking unto Jesus.” The Apostle had mentioned a great cloud of witnesses before, as exciting and encouraging us by their example. But he now passes from the saints to the Saviour; from the servants to the Master; from the witnesses of faith to “the author and finisher of faith.” He himself had an appointed course; he had difficulties to overcome, and much to endure: but he was not impeded or dismayed—“For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” That the Apostle *immediately* refers to him as our example, is obvious not only from the foregoing words, and the words I have just recited, but from the application following: “For, consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”—So Watts—

“Our glorious Leader claims our praise,
For his own pattern given;
While the long cloud of witnesses
Shew the same path to heaven.”

But does this exclude any other reference? Are we to regard him as an example only? We cannot indeed be Christians without resembling him. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk even as he walked." And every Christian loves his example, and prays to be like-minded with him. Yet what is the true exigency of our case? We are guilty—Where is the sacrifice that puts away sin? "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." We want righteousness and strength—Where are we to find them? "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength." How are we to be able to trace his dear steps as he goes before us in duty and suffering? "Without me," says he, "ye can do nothing:" but "my grace is sufficient for thee." We must therefore run, looking unto Jesus as delivered for our offences, as raised again for our justification, as one who ever lives to make intercession for us, as one in whom all fulness dwells, and from whose fulness we are to receive grace for grace. To him we are to look in every period, in every relation, in every engagement, in every trouble, in every danger, while we live—To him we are to look as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death—And then we are to go and behold him in the midst of the throne, where he attracts every eye, fills every heart, and employs every tongue.

OCTOBER 7.—MORNING.

"I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, said the Lord God."
EZEK. xxxiv. 15.

THIS is spoken of the subjects of divine grace.

Individually considered, they are called sheep, to remind us of their personal qualities; their weakness, meekness, gentleness, harmlessness, patience, and submission. Some in their affliction toss like a wild bull in a net. Lay hold of a swine, and the neighbourhood is alarmed. But observe the fleecy sufferer. She indeed palpitates. And the Christian may palpitate—and tremble—and be ready to faint; but his very manner silently says, I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me—Let thy lovingkindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.

Distinctively considered, they are not all sheep. Many of them are lambs. But these are sheep in nature and degree; and are equally dear to the Shepherd, with the older part of his charge—Yea, he gathers the lambs with his arms, and carries them in his bosom; and gently leads those that are with young. The margin is, those that have young. Lowth renders it, "The nursing ewes he will gently, lead." And we are persuaded that the force of this tender image applies to the lambs, and not to the mothers. If the latter were driven on fast, the former could not keep up with them, especially in rough ground; and, thus losing their maternal supplies, would droop and perish.

Collectively they are a flock. And *one* flock only: according to our Saviour's words, "one fold, and one shepherd." Whatever differences there are among

them, they are only the differences of sheep and of lambs. What difficulty is there in believing this? Essential sameness is not destroyed by circumstantial distinction. Unity is not incompatible with variety. Many branches make but one tree; many members but one body. Bigots would banish harmony from the church of God; for there can be no harmony where all the sounds are the same. God promised that he would give his people one heart and one way. And our Lord prayed that his followers might be one. Have this prayer and this promise been fulfilled? We dare not suppose the contrary: but if they have been accomplished, we may see what kind of *oneness* was intended—Not a oneness of opinion; not a sameness in forms of worship, and modes of discipline: for these never have been found: but a oneness, a sameness consistent with the variations that have obtained among them. A unity of spirit. A community of principles. A fellowship of privileges—all being redeemed by the same blood; justified by the same righteousness; renewed by the same grace; and joint heirs of the same glory. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

And is this flock ever forsaken or forgotten by him? “I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.” But tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, *where* thou *feedest*: *where* thou makest thy flock to *rest at noon*. For why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?

“Pain would I feed among *thy* sheep;
Among *them* rest, among *them* sleep.”

What says David? "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters."

'This is grace. What is glory? Hear the angel to John. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

There is another flock in the world. This consists of goats. They also have a shepherd. It is the Devil; and they are taken captive by him at his will. He also has under-shepherds to do his work; and to him they are amenable; and what a reward will he render them! But his flock, his direful flock—what food! what repose have they! What in time! What in eternity! The way of transgressors is hard. The end of these things is death—the second death. And if any of them should be intermixed with the flock of Christ, and escape detection here—"before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

OCTOBER 7.—EVENING,

"And prayed unto him." 2 CHRON. xxxiii. 13.

Few individuals ever surpassed Manasseh in depravity and wickedness. Yet he, even he, obtained mercy. And we here see the means employed for his conversion. Divine Providence so ordered things,

that the enemy invaded Judah and succeeded: "Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon." *There*, thus despoiled, degraded, and distressed—*there* the seeds of truth early sown in his mind began to revive; *there* the prayers of a pious father began to be answered—"and he prayed unto him."

Affliction alone never yet converted one soul. We have known fools who have been brayed in a mortar, yet has not their folly gone from them. Ice may be broken, and not dissolved: rock may be broken, and the fractions retain the same hardness as before. Yet there is a natural suitableness in affliction to produce the effect. It shows what an evil and bitter thing sin is, as the procuring cause of all our sufferings. It cuts the man off from present temptation; and affords him time and leisure for reflection; and the want of thought is the greatest obstacle to religion: hence the Scripture says, "Consider your ways;" and hence David acknowledges, "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." It shews the vanity of the world, and affords opportunity to introduce the proposal of a better portion; and to urge the resolution, "Therefore will I look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation." It befriends confession and prayer; therefore, says God, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early." The bemoaning and repenting Ephraim had been chastised. The famine made the Prodigal think of heaven, and resolve to throw himself upon his Father's mercy.

Here is therefore a very instructive fact. It teaches us that prosperity is no proof of Divine favour; and that adversity is not incompatible with the love of God, but may even flow from it. We congratulate our friends on their successes and risings in the world; but frequently, if we could see all, we should rather bewail them; for we should see their table becoming a snare, and their prosperity destroying them. On the other hand, we go and mourn with them over their losses and trials, when, if we could look forward, we should rather rejoice and be thankful; for we should see the valley of Achor given them for a door of hope; the ploughshare breaking up the fallow ground, to prepare it for the seed of the kingdom; the way hedged up with thorns, to keep the traveller from going astray. How should we have pitied Manasseh, had we seen him reduced from all his greatness, and thus indignantly and cruelly treated! But he soon acknowledged, with his pious ancestor, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted;" and he is now blessing God, not for his crown, but for his fetters—not for his palace, but for his dungeon—"This man was born there."

Let us always look hopefully towards the afflicted. While the physician yet administers medicine, we do not deem the case absolutely hopeless. While the husbandman prunes the tree, and digs about it, and manures it, we conclude he has not yet said to the feller, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

O what fools are we to look shy upon our troubles, and be afraid of our trials, instead of viewing them as some of the means of grace which God has ordained to bring us to himself! Let us not think of the bit-

terness of the draught, but of the sweetness of the health which it is designed to produce. "We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

OCTOBER 8.—MORNING.

"But in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." PHIL. IV. 6.

THIS is a simple and pleasing account of prayer—It is the making of our requests known unto God. He indeed knows them perfectly before we express them. But he will know them from *us*, that we may be properly affected with our own wants, and prepared for the displays of his goodness and grace. And the Apostle reminds us of three things very worthy of our attention with regard to prayer.

First. It is the prevention and cure of care. "Be careful for nothing—*but* in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." All feel anxiety to be a galling load. But the question is, how are we to disencumber ourselves of the burden?—All acknowledge the disorder; and many remedies have been prescribed for the cure. But if some of them affect

the paroxysm of the complaint, none of them reach the root of the malady. The commonness of the case; the brevity of time; the uselessness of giving way to solicitude; and the injurious effects of it: all these are true and proper—but they do not go far enough. The fact is, if *we* are not to be careful, *some* one must care for us. And the thing is, and nothing less than this can tranquillize the mind, to be under the management of *Him* who loves us better than we love ourselves, knows unerringly what is good for us, and is able to make every thing conduce to our welfare—"casting all our care on him; for he careth for us." And this is done by prayer. Hezekiah took the letter, and went and spread it before the Lord. Hannah poured out her heart before God, and her countenance was no more sad. In whatever has befallen or foreboded him, every believer has made the trial, and is able to say, with Asaph—"But it is good for me to draw near to God."

Secondly. It is to be very extensively, yea, universally performed. Not in some things or in many things—but in *every* thing, by prayer and supplication, we are to make our requests known unto God. Some only pray when God's chastening hand is upon them. In their affliction they seek him early. And this, as far as it goes, is not to be censured. Many, like Manasseh, have first sought God in trouble. Prayer is peculiarly seasonable in distress. But though prayer may commence in affliction, it is not to cease with it. It is not to be confined to it. Prayer is equally needful to preserve and sanctify us in prosperity. It is not praying on extraordinary occasions, but on common ones, that evinces a pious

frame of mind. Do we delight ourselves in the Almighty? Do we always call upon God? In all thy ways, says Solomon, acknowledge him. It is thus alone we give God the glory of his universal providence: not thinking, with the Assyrians, that he is the God of the hills only, but also of the valleys; and that a sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father; and that the very hairs of our head are all numbered. Some imagine that many things are too little to be the subjects of prayer. A distinction is indeed to be made between the particularity and minuteness of *private* and *public* prayer—But let us remember that we are not to consider any thing too little to bring before God that God does not deem beneath *his* notice. And also that it is difficult, if not impossible for us, in many cases, to ascertain what is little. Events the most important often hinge on circumstances apparently the most trivial. Joseph's going to inquire after the welfare of his brethren on the plain seemed a slight thing. Yet he that morning took leave of his father for more than twenty-one years; and went a way by which he never returned. Saul sought his father's asses—a thing that seemed devoid of consequence; but perhaps he perished, owing to it—for then began his prosperity, which destroyed him—when Samuel met him and anointed him king over Israel. You go out, not knowing what a day may bring forth, as to your happiness or misery—Before the evening you may meet accidentally with a connexion that shall prove a source of joy or suffering through life. "Why, this is enough to make one live and move in constant trembling!" This is not the design of it: but it is designed to induce you—

in every thing to commit your way and your works unto the Lord.

Thirdly. It is to be always attended with a pleasing companion—But in every thing, by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known unto God. And does not this imply that we can never approach God without having cause for gratitude? Hence it is said, in every thing give thanks. Whatever be our condition, we have much more to be grateful for than to complain of—Complain! What can ever justify complaint? Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let our losses and afflictions be what they may, he has not dealt with us after our desert, nor rewarded us according to our iniquity. Yea, the trials themselves are the effects of love, and designed to work together for our highest welfare.

And does it not teach us that whenever we go to God to ask for fresh favours, we should be sure to acknowledge the reception of former ones? How seldom is this the case! How much selfishness is there, even in our devotions! How much more of our worship is occupied in petition than in praise? Urged by our necessities, we go and call upon God in prayer; but when we have succeeded, we forget to return to give him the glory that is due unto his holy Name. Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Where is even Hezekiah? *He* rendered not according to the benefit done him.

OCTOBER 8.—EVENING.

"Verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

MATT. xiii. 17.

SOME may suppose that our Lord here uses what scholars call an anticlimax, and be ready to say, Surely, "a prophet" is above "a righteous man." Yet there is wisdom and design in the order in which he has mentioned these characters. A prophet was not necessarily a righteous man. Balaam prophesied, but loved the wages of unrighteousness. And the Saviour assures us that he will disown many in the last day as workers of iniquity, who prophesied in his name, and in his name did many wonderful things. And when the Apostle exhorts the Corinthians to covet earnestly the best gifts, he adds, And yet I shew unto you a more excellent way—adding, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity; I am nothing. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." So superior is grace, not only to all natural, but even supernatural endowments and capacities. He that humbleth himself as a little child, the same is greatest in the

kingdom of God. O that we were wise, that we understood this! But here we see the folly of men, who are eager to gain those distinctions which are confined to few, and never insure eternal life, while they disregard those privileges which always accompany salvation, and lie open to all. And we see the goodness of God in rendering what is essential to our highest welfare universally accessible. All cannot amass wealth, but all may be rich in faith: all cannot rise in the state, but all may sit with Christ in the heavenly places: all have not opportunity or capacity to acquire human learning, but all may become wise unto salvation. None can be "prophets" now, but all may be "righteous men."

We here see that the desires of the great and the good are not always gratified. We think it hard when the schemes on which we set our fond hearts are denied us. But we must learn to leave our wishes with God, and refer them to his goodness and wisdom. There may be reasons for the refusal, of which we have no apprehension. He is often constrained to say to us, "Ye know not what ye ask." Let the Lord choose our inheritance for us. And let us not murmur or complain if we are called to drink of the same cup with the most dear and eminent of his servants. Moses, who had conducted his charge for forty years, and brought them to the border of the promised land, was forbidden to enter, and no importunity could revoke the mortifying sentence. David, who so anxiously longed to build the temple of the Lord, and for which he had been preparing materials all through life, was not allowed the pleasure. "And many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see,

and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

They who have known something of the cause and glory of Christ will long to see and hear more. These persons had been favoured with some information concerning the Messiah, otherwise they could not have expressed these desires; for we cannot desire what we are entirely ignorant of: but the glimpse made them eager for the vision, and the dawn for the full day; the assurance made them eager for the reality, and the foretaste for the full fruition. It is always so. Knowledge keeps the possessor from self-satisfaction; and the more proficiency a man makes in any art or science, the less will he be disposed to say, "I have attained, I am already perfect." It was a man who had seen more of the glory of God than any human being who cried, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." Let a Christian know as much of Christ as Paul did, and he will think he knows nothing, and exclaim, "That I may know him."

In the knowledge God communicates to his creatures there are various degrees. The Patriarchs knew more than the descendants of Seth before the Flood. The Jews under Moses and the Prophets knew more than the Patriarchs. John's disciples knew more than the Jewish Church before them. The disciples of Jesus knew more than the disciples of John; and he that was least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than John himself. And how much more did the Apostles themselves know after the effusion of the Holy Ghost than before; according to the intimation and promise of the Saviour, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye

cannot bear them now: howbeit, when he the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all truth." And the same remark holds with regard to personal experience. There are many classes of scholars in the same school of Christ. How wise are some Christians! how clear, and full, and influential, are their views of Divine truth! How cloudy and indistinct are the conceptions of others! they resemble the half-enlightened patient in the Gospel, who "saw men as trees walking." The stations and callings of men differ; and some require more knowledge than others. We are like the members of the body; all are necessary, but all have not the same office. The eye is for seeing, the hand for working; the one requires light, the other strength.

Above all, we should learn from hence to compare our advantages with those of others. If superior, their pre-eminence should be applied to three purposes. First, to produce gratitude. "He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord." Not that our gratitude is to turn on the destitution of others; but we need contrasts to excite our feelings. Thus, to induce us the more to be thankful for health, we compare ourselves with those who are made to possess months of vanity, and have wearisome nights appointed unto them. And thus we teach our children to say,

"Not more than others I deserve,
Yet God hath given me more;
For I have feed while others starve,
Or beg from door to door."

And did we deserve our religious privileges? Did it depend upon us in what country we should be

born, whether heathen or Christian, popish or protestant? Or from what parents we should descend, whether such as would neglect our souls or bring us up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Who sent us an evangelical ministry? Why have we been fed with the choicest of the wheat, and with honey out of the rock have we been satisfied? "Not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy Name be glory."

Secondly, to promote holiness. It would be shameful if persons below us in means and advantages should be above us in attainment and practice. Surely there is to be a correspondence between privilege and duty. He who holds the largest farm must expect to pay the largest rent. Where much is given, much will be required. "What do ye more than others?" The Lord does not look for much where he bestows little; and he will not accept of little where he bestows much.

Thirdly, to awaken fear. "That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." And what ignorance can we plead? Or what want of motive? Or what refusal of assistance? "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." How did our Saviour upbraid the cities in which he had done so many mighty works, because they repented not: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more toler-

able for Tyre and Sidon, at the day of judgment than for you."

OCTOBER 9.—MORNING.

"I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought."
HOSEA xiii. 5.

THIS "wilderness" means the vast desert in which the Jews wandered for forty years, between Egypt and Canaan. It is characterized by one attribute—"A land of great drought." And this was enough to render it trying. But it was in every respect formidable and repulsive. Witness the language of Jeremiah: "Neither said they, Where is the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness: through a land of deserts, and of pits; through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death; through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt."

But *here* God says, "I knew thee." It cannot mean, a mere acquaintance with their condition and circumstances: for what can be hid from *Him* whose understanding is infinite? But it intends two things.

First. He knew them there, so as to provide for them. Thus it marks his goodness; and forms a contrast with the conduct of many of our fellow-creatures. A friend is born for adversity; and to him that is afflicted, pity *should* be shewed from his friend. But, alas! this is rarely exemplified. They who were intimate enough with their connexions before, scarcely know them when they are in distress. The flower which, when fresh and fragrant,

was put into the bosom, is, when withered and dry, thrown away. The garden which, while yielding every kind of gratification, is constantly visited, is deserted in winter. But it is otherwise with God. Though he never leaves his people, he has peculiarly promised to be with them in trouble. David acknowledged this: "Thou hast known my soul in adversity." And has he not known our souls in the same state? Has he not been better to us than our fears? Has he not proved himself "a very present help in trouble?" So it was with Israel—He found them in a desert land, in a waste howling wilderness. The situation afforded them no supplies, but he allowed them to want no good thing. He led them by a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night—healed the bitter waters of Marah—fetched them honey out of a rock, and oil out of the flinty rock—rained down manna upon them—suffered not their raiment to wax old upon them, nor their foot to swell in travelling—vanquished their enemies—gave them ordinances—and sent his Holy Spirit to instruct them—so that Moses well said, "Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved of the Lord!"

Secondly. He knew them there, so as to approve of them and acknowledge them. It is undeniable that the word *know* has this meaning, when it is said, "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous." "If a man love God, the same is known of him." "Know them that labour among you." But *did* God *thus* know them in the wilderness? Not absolutely, but comparatively. They followed him out of Egypt, and not one lingered behind. At the Red Sea they

sang his praise. At Sinai they cheerfully and unreservedly acceded to his covenant. And though they were guilty of many perversenesses and rebellions, yet they never wholly relinquished his worship, and established idolatry and wickedness by a law, as they afterwards did in Canaan. While we dwell on imperfections, God loves to make the best of things. Sarah spake unadvisedly with her lips: but she uttered one good thing—she called Abraham, Lord, and this only is mentioned to her praise. Job cursed the day of his birth: but when James refers to him, we hear only of the patience of Job. And observe God's *gracious* testimony concerning Israel at this period: "Go, and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend: evil shall come upon them, saith the Lord."

Adversity will not of itself secure godliness. Persons may be reduced, and not humbled. They may be afflicted, and God not know them in their distress. Yet, in general, if you observe others, and review your own experience, you will find times of affliction have been more friendly to religion than seasons of ease and prosperity.

When has God known your conscience most wakeful, and your heart most watchful against sin? Before I was afflicted, says David, I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.

When has God known your souls most weaned

from the world, and willing to leave it? When all was agreeable and inviting? Or when every thing conspired to tell you, that this is not your rest?

When has He known you value most the communion of saints; the means of grace; the preaching of the word? When did your eye bedew your Bible? When, pressing the Sacred Volume to your bosom, did you say, Unless thy laws had been my delight, I should have perished in mine affliction?

When has He known you most frequently and earnestly addressing the Throne of his Grace? In their affliction they will seek me early. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord. Even the Saviour himself, being in an agony, prayed more earnestly. "O my people," says he here—"you and I were better acquainted in the wilderness, when you were in a low condition. You were then left to my immediate care; and you lived daily by faith. Then you made me many a visit—but now we seldom meet."

Such is the effect of indulgence, and of fulness. He therefore immediately adds, "According to their pasture, so were they filled: they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me."

OCTOBER 9.—EVENING.

"All the house of Israel are hardhearted." **Ezek. ix. 7**

How is this charge to be taken? There are two things in which hardness of heart is to be known: insensibility and inflexibleness.

A hard heart is an *insensible* heart. The Apostle

speaks of "men being past feeling." This is to be restrained to its subject. He does not refer to inhumanity, but impiety. Persons may have feeling in other things, but here the senselessness regards "the things of the Spirit." Feeling, though not the noblest of our senses, is the most necessary and extensive; other senses are confined to particular parts, but feeling is diffused over the whole body. When there is no feeling in a member, there is no more intercourse of the animal and vital spirits; and where feeling is totally absent, there are no remains of life. There may be life where other senses are wanting. A man may be deaf and alive, blind and alive; but if he has no feeling, he must be dead. Upon the same principle, the Apostle says, men are "dead in trespasses and sins." As a dead body is insensible to material things around it, so it is with the unrenewed soul: it meets all the objects and agencies of the spiritual world with indifference and unconcern. Though the man is charged with numberless transgressions, and the wrath of God abideth on him, he is sensible of no burden; and though destruction and misery are in his ways, he is secure and unalarmed.

A hard heart is an *inflexible* heart.

It does not yield to the *dictates of His word*. At this a good man trembles. As he turns to the Scriptures, he says, I will hear what God the Lord shall speak; but the hardened sinner says, with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" He may not, indeed, in so many terms, but he really says unto God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Though God reproves, encourages, asserts his authority, dis-

plays the reasonableness of his commands, addresses our hope and our fear, draws back the veil that hides the eternal world, and sets life and death, blessing and cursing, before them, they turn away from him that speaketh, and reject the counsel of God against themselves.

It does not yield to the *dispensations of His providence*. God begins perhaps with others; and a good man, when he sees their visitations, says, with David, "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments." It is the design of them: "I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; but they rose up, and corrupted all their doings." He then comes nearer, and strikes themselves. He afflicts them in time, that they may not be condemned for ever. But they regard the suffering as the effects of chance; they feel the pain, but never think of the procuring cause, which is sin, or the final cause, which is their spiritual profit. Yea, sometimes, instead of falling in with the design, they directly oppose it: when stricken, they strike again: they rush upon the thick bosses of his buckler, and "say, in the pride and stoutness of heart, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars." Nothing can be more offensive to God than such stubbornness as this:—"In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Abaz." It is equally inflexible to kindness and mercy. Other creatures

live upon God, but they are incapable of knowing the source of their supplies; but the inspiration of the Almighty giveth man understanding, and enables him to see the cause and author of all good; and a tender heart would love and acknowledge the donor in his bounties. They are designed to encourage and allure us: they are cords of a man and bands of love, by which he would draw us to himself. And "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

It yields not to the *motions of His Spirit*. When Paul reasoned before Felix of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled; but, instead of cherishing the conviction, he endeavoured to get rid of it by dismissing Paul till a more convenient opportunity; and carefully avoiding the topic when they met. Israel not only rebelled, but "vexed his Holy Spirit." The old world, by the preaching of Noah, was addressed and often excited, as we find implied in the words, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man upon the earth." Who has not felt motives which have almost persuaded him to be a Christian? Who has not formed resolutions to abandon the world, and cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart? Who has not had softenings of heart, in which he has drawn into retirement, and pouring out tears unto God, said, Lord, I am thine, save me? What difficulties have many had to overcome before they could advance in a sinful course! They had to break through mercies and judgments: to throw down friends and parents who kindly opposed them; yea, to trample under foot the Son of God, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace—

Oh! seek deliverance from this evil, if you are the subjects of it. Remember, that it is a most dreadful curse, and will be sure to treasure up for you wrath against the day of wrath. But reflect still more upon its vileness, and say, Oh! what a hateful heart is mine that feels nothing! Yields to nothing! Pray earnestly. And be encouraged by the promise, "I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Place yourselves near the cross, and look on him whom you have pierced.

And if you are saved from this evil, be thankful. "But I know not that I am saved from it. I feel such unsuitableness to duty, and such dulness, such deadness in it!" But if you were impenitent, how could you *feel* this? You should rather say with Cowper,

"Cold as I feel this heart of mine,
Yet since I feel it so,
It yields some hope of life divine
Within, however low."

OCTOBER 10.—MORNING.

"And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran."

NUMB. x. 12.

If the Jews, as the Apostle assures us, were our ensamples, in nothing do they more represent the experience of Christians, than in their progress from Egypt to Canaan.

They had now continued many months in the wilderness of Sinai, where the law was given, and all the ordinances of divine worship were established. There they had committed idolatry, and provoked the Most High to anger; and there he proved himself the just God and the Saviour. He forgave their iniquities, but took vengeance on their inventions. They were now to enter the wilderness of Paran, a vast desert of several days' journey; and where the greater part of their subsequent stations were fixed. "And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran." *Thus they only marched from one wilderness into another.* And is not this the case with all our changes in this world? Let us look at a few of them, and we shall see, that whatever they may promise—as to satisfaction and happiness—they leave us much the same as they find us.

Is it not so when we pass from one *period* to another? Every age has been full of complaints; and here it is remarkable, instead of supposed improvement, the inquiry has always been, "What is the cause that the former days were better than these?" We end one year with a kind of gloom, and hail the arrival of another; but the months are found the same with those which had previously passed away. The winter is not without cold, nor the summer without heat. We feel in our early days the confinement of school, and the restraints of a father's house; we long to be at our own disposal, and to enter life for ourselves. But where is the man that has not exclaimed, "O that I was as in the days of my youth!" Much is said of an agreeable and peaceable old age. Who does not desire many days, that he may see good?

yet is their strength labour and sorrow. Another girds, and leads us whither we would not. In vain we look around for our early and endeared connexions—Lover and friend is put far from us, and our acquaintance into darkness. The days are come, in which we say, "I have no pleasure in them." "All that cometh is vanity."

Is it not the same when we pass from one *residence* to another? There are few but have known local changes; and some, by a train of events, have been led to pitch their tents in situations the most remote from all their former expectations. Sometimes a removal is not at our own option. In other cases it seems very inviting and desirable. It may have preferable claims. But still it is a removal *in* the wilderness, not *out* of it. To Abraham, God said, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy father's house, into a land that I will tell thee of;" and this was the Land of *Promise*—Yet even there he shared in the troubles of his nephew Lot—went for years without an heir to his wealth—was tried in offering up his son Isaac—and buried his Sarah out of his sight, in the cave of Machpelah. There, by faith, he sojourned, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles—not at home—but looking for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Is it not the same when we go from one *condition* to another? Many deem it a fine thing to pass from obscurity to splendour, forgetful that distinction and fame will draw forth envy, and excite evil speaking, and deprive us of the sweets of retirement and leisure. David rose from a shepherd's cottage to the grandeur of a palace, and then sighed, "O that I had wings like a dove; for then would I fly away, and be at

rest." How wise was the Shunamite! When Elisha offered to speak for her to the king: "I dwell," saie she, "among mine own people." Some deem it a great thing to rise from indigence to wealth. By their eagerness to acquire it, all seem to think, if they could have affluence, they should want nothing. But does a man's life consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth? His desires increase with his means; and in the midst of his sufficiency he is in straits. The same may be said in passing from activity to leisure. "Oh!" says one, "when I have acquired so much, and can withdraw from the world where I have been so tried, I *shall* be happy." But to withdraw from the world is not so easy. Habits form a second nature. Few are qualified either to improve, or to enjoy solitude. No kind or degree of exertion is so much at variance with happiness as having nothing to do. Ennui is an insect that preys upon all bodies at rest. Satan found David alone; and Eve alone. It is the will of Nature and Providence that we should pass from individual into social life; and Solomon says, He that findeth a wife, findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord. And the conjugal condition, wisely and piously entered, in a general way, admits of more happiness than any other. But it may produce the keenest anguish. At best, it cannot yield pure and unalloyed felicity—our affections become sources of anxiety and fear—We share the pains, as well as the pleasures, of those who are one with us—and every delightful tie is mortal. How impatient are some to enter the parental relation! Lo! children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward. But the proverb truly calls them, Certain cares, and

uncertain comforts. How often do the father and mother mourn over undutifulness! depravity! an early grave! Childhood and youth are vanity.

"This is a very gloomy view of things"—but is it not a true one? a Scriptural one? And if so, should it not check presumption and vain confidence? Should it not inspire sober and moderate expectation, with regard to every earthly scene—in those who are just entering life?—and in those who are on the verge of any change in it?

Is there, however, nothing to encourage and comfort under such a dispensation? Much every way. Such a state of things is not *casual*—"The children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran." Therefore, though they removed from one desert into another, it was under the Lord's guidance and conduct. He determines the bounds of our habitation, and administers all our comforts and our crosses.—Such a state of things we are not *unapprized of*; and therefore, if we go on, buoyed up with hopes, which must issue in disappointment, the fault is our own. All history, observation, experience, and Scripture, tell us enough to prevent it.—Such a state, too, is not *peculiar* to us—It has been known by all our brethren who were before us in the world, and will be realized by all those who come after us.—Nor is it our *final* state. Another is discovered and promised. There remaineth a rest for the people of God: a better, even a heavenly country. A few more stages, and we shall remove to the glory of all lands. No thorns there; no dangers there. After all our movements in the wilderness, we shall move out of it; and the days of our mourning will be ended. Neither is it

an *unmixed* state. If we are not in Canaan, the desert we are in is not like Egypt, from whence we came out. Like the Jews, we have many advantages and comforts, though the place itself yields us nothing. We have the fiery cloudy pillar; and water from the rock; and the manna; and Moses, Aaron, and Miriam; and the grapes from Eshcol; and God himself, "even our own God," who is nigh unto us in all that we call upon him for.—Yea, the very difficulties, mortifications, and distresses of the state are *useful*. They try us, and humble us, and do us good with regard to our latter end. But for these, how unwilling should we be to go! How vain would the admonition be, "Arise and depart;" unless it were enforced with the conviction—"This is not your rest."

Let this, therefore, keep us from the murmurings of discontent, and the forebodings of despondency. Though serious, let us not be gloomy. And while free from delusive hopes, let us not yield to unbelieving fears, but thank God, and take courage.

OCTOBER 10.—EVENING.

"All thy children shall be taught of the Lord."

ISAIAH liv. 13.

ALL therefore want tuition. We are naturally ignorant, as well as guilty, and depraved, and helpless. Knowledge is not innate, but acquired. Some are always extolling nature at the expense of art: yet what would the earth be without cultivation? What would a garden be if left without keeping and dressing, but a little wilderness of barrenness and rudeness, of weeds and thorns? Such would a child be if left to himself. What makes the greatest difference

een one man and another? Not the body, nor limbs, the senses—In all these the savage may have the advantage; but the difference is in their minds; and the difference in their minds is chiefly owing to education.

Few indeed will deny this; but many are unwilling to acknowledge their spiritual ignorance, and in the concerns of religion suppose that the way of man is in himself, and that it is in man that walketh to direct his steps. Yet, though vain man would be wise, he is born like a wild ass's colt. The world by wisdom knew not God; with all their advances in civilization and science, professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And what is the fact with regard to every unconverted sinner? He is alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him, and because of the blindness of his heart. To enable a blind man to see, it is necessary not only to bring the lamp, but to open his eyes; and the Scripture speaks of opening the eyes of the understanding, and giving us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ.

God's teaching therefore is two-fold. First, external. He thus teaches us by all his works which praise him. The heavens declare his glory, the firmament sheweth his handy work, and there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. But he has magnified his word above all his Name. The Scripture is given by inspiration of God. The knowledge of the grand truths in the Gospel depended entirely on the sovereign pleasure of the Almighty. We had sinned, and were left to his mercy; and it was for him to determine whether we should be saved, and in what way. And how could this deter-

mination be discovered? Not by any process of reasoning, but by testimony, and his own testimony: "As it is written; Eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so, the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. And this book contains all the information God chooses to afford us on this side the irradiations of eternity. Jesus, near two thousand years ago, was the finisher as well as the author of faith, and a curse was annexed to the man who should add to the words of the book, as well as to him who should take away. As we look for no new doctrine, prophecy, promise, or precept, so we need none. Here is information enough, if we understand, and feel, and practise it. And it is the office of the Spirit to lead us into all truth—

And thus the Lord teaches internally. For revelation does not supersede our dependence on the agency of Divine grace. David, who had the word, yet prayed, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Here is the book; but who teaches us to read? Who removes our carelessness, and fixes our minds? Who subdues our prejudices, and gives us a holy taste, so that our delight is in the law of the Lord, and we meditate in it day and night? Who shews us not only the reality, but the beauty and glory of Divine things, and gives them by faith a residence and an empire in the soul? What a difference is there between specu-

lation and experience! Between the convictions of the judgment and the decisions of the will and the ardour of the affections! The knowledge he imparts descends from the head into the heart. The illumination he spreads is not the cold barren light of the moon, but the shining of the spring sun, which not only enlightens, but warms and enlivens, and fills the earth with fertility and beauty.

Let this direct and encourage us. It is the Lord alone that teaches us to profit: he alone can render the most common truth impressive and influential. Moses had seen the Egyptians destroyed in the Red Sea, and all the multitudes of his brethren buried in the wilderness. And needed he to be taught the doctrine of mortality? Knew he not that the days of our years are threescore years and ten? and that the period of human life is as uncertain as it is short? Yet he felt that no less a teacher than God was necessary, to instruct him properly: and therefore he prays, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." And do we not see the need of this continually? Our neighbours fall around us. Death enters our houses. We feel the attacks of disease; and the decays of nature; and yet how do we live? As dying creatures? or, as those who suppose they are to live here always?

But while we feel our need of this teaching, let us remember, that he gives his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. If we perish for lack of knowledge, our sin will lie at our own door. "If any lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." We are incapable of conducting ourselves; but here is an infallible Director, who offers to accompany us, and

would never leave us nor forsake us, and requires nothing but our submission—May the language of my heart be, "Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day."

OCTOBER 11.—MORNING.

"And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." LUKE XXIV. 50, 51.

FROM another Scripture, it would seem that he ascended from Mount Olivet. But there is no contradiction here. The same eminence is intended—On the one side of it, in the garden of Gethsemane, he suffered; on the opposite side, stretching down to Bethany, he was received up into glory. And we see the latter was some considerable distance from the former: for, of the attendants at his ascent it is said, "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath-day's journey."

Thither he seems to have led his disciples for the sake of abstraction and privacy. He had said before his death, "The world seeth me no more." They had seen him, and believed not. To what purpose should other proofs be displayed before those on whose minds all his miracles had made no impression? And here was a sufficient number to attest the fact; and reason cannot question the competency of these witnesses, either as to capacity or sincerity.

But how wonderful and pleasing is the manner in which he took his leave! His disciples had often

tried him. They had always betrayed great imperfections; and after all their professions of attachment to him, as soon as he was apprehended, they all forsook him and fled. He might well have cast them off: but he loved them unto the end. He might have forgiven them; and yet have left them unseen—or silently—or with a frown—or with a rebuke—and this would almost have broken their hearts: but “he lifted up his hands and blessed them!” Thus proclaiming the most cordial forgiveness; thus assuring them, that they might rely on his remembering them when he was come into his kingdom.

Dr. Priestley is much perplexed about his present residence and employment. It would appear, he says, from some intimations in the Epistles, as if he still had occasionally something to do with the Church; but what this is we cannot conjecture. And there is no doubt, says he, but he is now somewhere on earth: for what relation can he have to any other planet?—But *we* are assured that while he blessed his disciples he was parted from them, “and carried up into *heaven*.” Where this is we are not informed. But it is obviously a place: for he was clothed in a body like our own; and corporeally, he cannot be everywhere. But wherever he *thus* is, there is heaven. And this accords with his own language—“I go to prepare a *place* for you.” And though heaven is to be considered *more* as a state than a place, and though even now our happiness does not depend essentially upon local situations, yet these have their importance—And what beautiful and enchanting places have we seen, and heard of, and imagined! But “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the

things which God hath prepared for them that love him." What a residence was Eden before the fall of the first Adam! But this fell infinitely short of the excellency of the abode of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven—

"Oh! the delights, the heavenly joys,
The glories of the place,
Where Jesus sheds the brightest beams
Of his o'erflowing grace!"

Well, let us think of him where he now is; and let us inquire what is our duty with regard to him. Hear Paul—"Seeing, then, that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." We need not be afraid to own him—for he is able to take care of us, however we may be exposed. We need not be ashamed to avow him—for he has every thing to induce us to glory in him. Some comparative excuse might be made for Peter. When he denied him he was a prisoner at the bar, and going to be crucified as a malefactor. But where is he when we deny him? In the midst of the throne—crowned with glory and honour—the Lord of all.

Let us follow him in our thoughts and affections. Why seek we the living among the dead? He is not *here*. He is in heaven; and where our treasure is, there should our hearts be also. Let us therefore have our conversation in heaven; and seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. There some of us have much to interest us now—We seem more related to another world than this—and reflecting upon our losses, we sigh, and say, "What do I *here*? and what have I *here*?" How many among the blessed can we

reckon up, who we feel are drawing us after them!
But here is the principal attraction—

“Jesus, my all, to heaven is gone,
He whom I fix my hopes upon :
His track I see, and I’ll pursue
The narrow path, till him I view.”

And let us rejoice in the expectation of being for ever with him. “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus.” The anchor that holds the ship is cast out of it; and our hope must go out of ourselves. The anchor lays hold of something invisible; and our hope enters heaven. Yet it would find nothing as the ground of its grasp *there*, if *he* was not there—But *he is* there—and there for *us*—and *his* being there insures *our* arrival. He is the forerunner of the whole company. He said, as he entered, “I am come; and all my people are coming.” Unless we are there also, he would be disappointed; for he prayed, “Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, to behold my glory.” He would be unfaithful; for he said, “Where I am there shall also my servants be.” He would be imperfect: for he is the bridegroom, and they are the bride: he is the head, and they are the members of his body.

O blessed confidence! let me feel thy influence in every duty and in every trial. Henry, after a sweet representation of the place, exclaims, “If this be heaven, O that I was there!” How matchlessly simple and affecting does Bunyan end his story of Christian and Hopeful, after they had passed the

river and approached the shining city, the object of all their solicitude!—"Now just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them. And behold, the city shone like the sun. The streets, also, were paved with gold. And in them walked many men, with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps, to sing praises withal. There were also of them that had wings; and they answered one to another, without intermission, saying, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord.' And after that, they shut up the gates—WHICH WHEN I HAD SEEN, I WISHED MYSELF AMONG THEM."

OCTOBER 11.—EVENING.

"Man dieth." JOB xiv. 10.

BUT how came he to die? He was not made mortal like the beasts that perish. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, because all have sinned."

But now there is not a day, or an hour, or a moment, in which man dieth not. The frequency of the occurrence hinders much of the force and seriousness of the impression it is otherwise so adapted to produce. "They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever without any regarding it." And not only the commonness, but the irksomeness of the event is unfriendly to consideration. The subject is too gloomy and repulsive to engage the thought of the generality of mankind; and the main concern of thousands is, to keep it, or banish it from their minds. Yet their putting the evil day far off is not putting it away. ~~The way to die safely is to die~~

daily. Young says, "Familiar thoughts will smooth the road to death:" and the royal preacher tells us, "sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart."

We often see a fellow-creature in situations and circumstances peculiar to himself, and in which we shall not be called to follow him: but when we see man dying, we behold an emblem and an instance of our own destiny; and we should bring home the case, and say, By-and-by I shall require these attentions—What I now hear and see I shall experience—My soul will refuse dainty meat—a shivering will seize my trembling limbs—and the world will recede from my view, and appear like land to the mariner entering the ocean. Infinitely diversified as human conditions are, they all terminate in the same result. All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Death is the way of all the earth—

And what is it for man to die? It is an event the most solemn and affecting, whatever view we may take of it. It is the termination of all his busy concerns in life, and suffers him to interfere no more in any thing that is done under the sun. It is his farewell to earth with all its possessions and attractions; his eye will no more see good. It is the disruption of all his ties of friendship and kindred here; to say to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister. It is the destruction of his body, so fearfully and wonderfully made, and the reducing of it to such a state of loathsomeness, ~~as compels the survivors to bury their dead~~

out of their sight, and to inscribe over the sepulchre—

"How loved, how valued once, avails thee not;
To whom related, or by whom begot;
A heap of dust alone remains of thee;
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be."

It is his entering into a new and untried mode of being; his transition from a course of action to a state of retribution. It is a thing that cannot be repeated, and the consequences of which are irreversible: it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

So far one event happeneth to all. But there is a vast difference in men's dying, according as they are morally and religiously considered. *The wicked is driven away in his wickedness.* His death, indeed, is not always very dreadful in the manner. There is sometimes a strange senselessness that attends it. Frequently even the danger of dissolution is concealed from him, and he dies "a slow sudden death." The poet's words are not true,

"Fools men may live, but fools they cannot die:"

for observation shews us that commonly men die as they live. The Scripture says of many of them, "They have no bands in their death, but their strength is firm." This is sometimes indeed affected rather than real. When they have died with a kind of levity and sportiveness, it has been by way of diversion. They would indeed have it supposed to be a proof of the absence of fear; but it is the effect of its prevalence—So the schoolboy passes the churchyard

"Whistling aloud to keep his courage up."

I have heard from dying lips exclamations of anguish and horror, which I should not like to publish. These are often attributed to disease, and the poor wretch is supposed to be under the influence of delirium—and it may be so—But whatever may be the manner of departure, as to those that die in their sins, the consequences are dreadful beyond imagination. If they even fall asleep as gently as lambs, they awake with the devil and his angels.

But the dying chamber of the children of God and the heirs of immortality is none other but the house of God and the gate of heaven. We are affected to see them going; it would be criminal not to feel, and to pray, Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men. We lose much by their removal; but our loss is their gain. Dying to them is but resting from their labours; is but departing to be with Christ, which is far better—*The righteous hath hope in his death.* “I know,” says he, “whom I have believed. Mine eyes have seen his salvation. The warfare is accomplished. Let me go forth, and take the crown of glory that fadeth not away. Let me leave this vale of tears, and enter into the joy of my Lord.”—

“O glorious hour, O blessed abode!
I shall be near and like my God;
And flesh and sense no more control
The sacred pleasures of my soul.”

Do all the Lord's people die in rapture? By no means. Various circumstances may affect their views and feelings; but they all die equally safe, and the issue is equally glorious. And in general the Lord is peculiarly indulgent to his dying followers. Their peace is compared to a river, and that river enlarges

as it approaches the sea—Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace. Peace, not only compared with the end of others, but with much of his own previous course. As to his condition and experience, the day was dark and distressing, but at eventide it was light. All this the Christian may safely commit unto the Lord. It is his duty and privilege to take no thought for the morrow. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof, and also the good. And these shall be proportioned to each other by Him who has commanded us to seek for grace to help in time of need, and has promised that as our day is so shall our strength be.

But we thus see that though the religion of Jesus does not exempt us from dying as well as other men, it prevents our dying like them. It prepares us for the change. It turns the curse into a blessing. It brings to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Lord, so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

OCTOBER 12.—MORNING.

"I am the good shepherd." JOHN x. 14.

To prove, or rather to exemplify his goodness, let us consider his sheep in three periods and conditions; and observe his conduct towards them in each.

First. See them in their *natural* state. Thus they were fallen and guilty creatures; in want and danger;

and ready to perish. Here his goodness appeared in undertaking their cause, and engaging to be their shepherd. For nothing but goodness could have induced him to do this. He was under no power or authority to constrain him—He was influenced by no application or desire in the subjects of his pity—And he was not ignorant of what the interposition would cost him. He knew that if he would be their shepherd, he must bleed and die. What says the Church? “All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” What says he himself? “The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” And all this he suffered, not complainingly, but with inexpressible alacrity and pleasure—I delight to do thy will—How am I straitened till it be accomplished!—Nor was this all. After he had redeemed them by his blood, he had to search, and find them, and bring them from their wanderings into his fold. Hear his own representation—He goeth after that which is lost in the wilderness until he find it. And when he has traversed the desert, weary, and wounded by the thorns and briers, and has found it, what does he? Does he complain of his privations, fatigues, and sufferings? No: he layeth it on his shoulder, *REJOICING*: and when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, *Rejoice with me*; for I have found the sheep which was lost.

Secondly. View them in their *restored* estate. Here his goodness appears in making such ample and rich provision for them. For he does not bring them into barrenness. They shall not want. He will feed them in a good pasture.—It appears in affording them

repose, as well as food. For they want rest, as well as supplies, especially at noon. And, says he, I will not only feed my flock, but cause them to lie down. He maketh them to lie down in green pastures.—It appears in recalling them when wandering. He restoreth my soul, says David.—It appears in defending them. They shall never perish, says the Shepherd; neither shall any pluck them out of his hand.—It appears in accommodating himself so kindly and tenderly to their age and weakness. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

Thirdly. See them in their *final* state. *Here* he does much for them; and they are often deeply affected with it, especially when they consider where he found them, and what they once were. But when they look into his promises, they see that he intends to do infinitely more. How great is the goodness which he has laid up for them that fear him! Earth is too narrow to contain it. Time is too short to display it. It doth not yet appear what they shall be. There is a land of pure delight; a better, a heavenly country, prepared to receive them. There is, indeed, a dark valley to pass, before they can enter it. But it is safe, and short, and their shepherd is with them there; and his rod and his staff will comfort them. And when they have passed it, "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Blessed Jesus! how well hast thou said, "I am the good Shepherd!"

Let those that belong to him, love him, and honour him with their confidence. Trust in him at all times, ye people. Resign to him all your interests. It is enough that he careth for you. You know his aim. You know that all his ways are mercy and truth.

But are we a part of his charge? Are we sheep? Are we lambs? How may we know this? They are marked—marked in the ear—and marked in the foot. My sheep *hear* my voice—and they *follow* me.

OCTOBER 12.—EVENING.

"Full of grace and truth." JOHN I. 14.

In another place it is said, "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." But things may come by a person who is not possessed of them; or he may possess them and not be filled with them—But He was "full of grace and truth."

"Grace" peculiarly signifies goodness, kindness, tenderness, mildness. And was he not full of these? We cannot tell what kind of person he had, but we are sure of his temper and disposition. It was prophesied of him that he should come down like rain upon the mown grass; that he should gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that were with young; that a bruised reed should he not break, and smoking flax should he not quench—And follow him in the days of his flesh. See him having compassion upon the multitude, because they had nothing to eat. Hear him saying to the poor and afflicted, Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Ask the woman who was a sinner whether he was not full of grace, when he said, "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee." Ask the widow of Nain whether

he was not full of grace, when he met her at the funeral of her only son, and said unto her, Weep not, and restored her last comfort to her embrace. See him in sight of Jerusalem weeping over it, not at the thought of the sufferings they were going to inflict upon himself, but of the miseries they were drawing down upon their own heads.

The influences of the Spirit are often called grace, because they flow from the free and undeserved favour of God. Of these he was full. He had every moral excellency in him, and in a perfect degree. All his people have the same Spirit in measure, but he had it without measure. He was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. If the holiest man on earth were to dwell with you, you would find a deficiency in his grace. But Jesus was full of grace. Grace was poured into his lips, into his life. It filled every thing he said, every thing he did.

And he was replenished not only for himself, but for us. It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. And in him we are blessed with all spiritual blessings. Thus in the famine Joseph had all the corn, and Pharaoh said to the people, Go unto Joseph. Yet his stores, though great, continually diminished, and at length were exhausted. But the fulness of Jesus, however numberless the relieved, remains the same, and could supply myriads more.

He was also "full of truth." It would be a low sense to say that he was full of sincerity. But as he did no sin, so neither was guile found in his mouth. What therefore he said could be relied upon by those who heard him; and as you have his words, you may rely upon them too. But he was full of truth, as truth is opposed to figure or to error. The one is the

truth of reality or accomplishment. The law was a shadow of good things to come; but he was the body. There was enough in him to realize and verify all the types, ceremonies, and sacrifices of the preceding dispensation. He was the true bread that came down from heaven; the true rock that followed the people in the wilderness; the true tabernacle; the true temple—or, the truth of all this.—The other is the truth of doctrine. Darkness had covered the earth, and gross darkness the people; but for this end was he born, and for this cause came he into the world, to bear witness to the truth. What truth? There are many kinds of truth. But the truth he communicated was religious truth; the highest kind of truth; the truth that makes us wise unto salvation! the truth that shews us how we can be pardoned and sanctified, and attain eternal life. To be led into all this truth is wisdom, liberty, and happiness. Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound. Go away! Lord, to whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

OCTOBER 13.—MORNING.

"I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

MAL. iii. 17.

IF a man spares any one, it will surely be his own son. The very relation pleads for him. Even a faulty child is a child still; and is not easily turned out of doors, like a servant. Absalom had risen in rebellion against his father; and David was compelled to fight with his own son—But, said he, on the eve of the battle, deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom! Who can imagine his

feelings, while thinking of the action? With what hope and fear was his parental bosom fluttering, when the messenger arrived with the result! Who does not seem to hear his very heart-strings break, as he goes up into the chamber, weeping, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"—But when a son is dutiful, and the father sees that he desires, and aims, and endeavours to please him! Now this is the image God here employs, to raise our confidence the more. I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. In the same strain is our Saviour's tender appeal—"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him!" God's own children, who serve him, need sparing mercy. It is exercised towards them four ways.

First. He spares them as to exemption. This has often been seen in times of public and general calamity. Does the Flood come and sweep away the world of the ungodly? An Ark is provided for the saving of Noah and his house. Are the Cities of the Plain destroyed? Lot is sent forth out of the overthrow. Darkness that might be felt enveloped the Egyptians; but the Israelites had light in all their dwellings. When the executioners were approaching Jerusalem, Set a mark, says God, upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for the abominations that are done in the midst of the land. Some of his servants are taken away from the evil to come. Pious connexions, removed by death, are often spared the sight of relative troubles, under

which perhaps they would have sunk. Many a pious youth, like Abijah, has come to an early grave in peace, and been housed from after-storms. The heathens said, They whom the gods love, die young. How often has he spared us; spared our lives, our senses, our limbs, our substance, our relations and friends! with regard to all of which, we must gratefully acknowledge, It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.

Secondly. He spares them as to correction. As his word tells us, "He that spareth the rod hateth his son;" *He* will not himself refuse to strike, when it is needful. Whom the Lord loveth, he therefore chasteneth—But how? What is the prayer of his people? O Lord, correct me, but with judgment: not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing. And he hears them; and spares them as to the degree of the affliction. "In measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it: he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind." They are afflicted; but they have alleviations. It might have been much worse. Others are more distressed. One comfort is gone; but many remain. Cast down, but not destroyed. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. He knoweth our frame: he remembereth that we are dust." For the same holds with regard to continuance; he will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever. "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth, for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." See an instance of this sparing goodness expressed with incomparable tenderness, with regard to Ephraim: "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?"

for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

Thirdly. He spares them as to exertion. He considers their strength, and will not require of some, what he ordains for others. A father, in his family, would not impose upon an infant the service he would lay upon a young man. To some in Thyatira, the Lord said, I will put upon you none other burden. The children are tender, says Jacob; and the flocks and herds with young are with me; and if men should over-drive them one day, all the flock would die. How much does this remind us of another, of whom it is said, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young"! When our Saviour was blamed for not enjoining fastings on his disciples, he replied; "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment; for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles; else the bottles break and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved." There is, says Henry, in well-doing an over-doing; and such over-doing as may prove undoing. Many religious people are blamable here. They expect too much to be given up before persons have realized the comforts of the Holy Ghost. They want to effect every thing at a stroke. They forget their own ignorance and slowness when God began to deal with them—They forget Him who does not despise the day of small things.

They forget Him who said to his followers, I have yet many things to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now.

Fourthly. He spares them as to acceptance. Their best actions are imperfect. Their holiest duties are defiled. Their obedience needs pardon. To whom does not this apply? Nehemiah had done much for the cause of God: but does he appeal to justice, to reward him? No; but to mercy, to forgive him: "Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy." Paul, after extolling Onesiphorus so highly, prays that even he may find mercy of the Lord in that day. I am looking, says the great John Howe when dying, for eternal life; not as a profitable servant, but as a pardoned sinner. Where is the Christian, however distinguished his attainments, who, even in looking over his Sabbaths, and his communions at the Lord's table, and every alms-deed he ever performed, is not constrained to pray, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified"?—Well; he will spare you, as to your deficiencies in duty. He takes the design. He regards the motive. He looketh at the heart. He will pardon what is yours; and reward what is his own. He views you and your services through the mediation of his dear Son, in whom he is well pleased. Ah! *he spared not him, that he might spare you.* If we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins. And as God said to Job's friends, so he says to us—"My servant shall pray for you, and him will I accept; lest I deal with you, according to your folly."

Never forget the goodness and kindness of God. He is your father—and he will spare you—

But spare not yourselves. Mind no labour. Regard no expense in his cause. Deny yourselves. Take up your cross, and follow him fully—follow him whithersoever he goeth.

OCTOBER 13.—EVENING.

“Peter, therefore, was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him.” ACTS xii. 5.

It is pleasing and useful to contemplate the wise and good in trying scenes: to see what they do in the hour of danger and distress: what is their resource and how they make use of it. The Church was now in a state of great suffering and alarm, on account of Peter's imprisonment and intended execution; but alone, and at their family altars, and in their social and public meetings, they made prayer unto God for him. Prayer is the refuge and solace of those who are in any trouble—It is therefore graciously prescribed; “Call upon me in the day of trouble.” “Is any afflicted? let him pray.” It is one of the designs of affliction to excite us to pray more frequently, and more earnestly: and God, who knows the importance of the exercise, and what will conduce to it, says, “I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.”

We also see that intercession, or praying for others, as well as for ourselves, is a duty. Thus our Lord teaches us, when we pray, to say, “*Our Father*”—and “give us day by day *our daily bread*.” Thus we are commanded to pray for all men—and surely

therefore for the servants of Christ, and those who are suffering according to the will of God. Let us not be selfish in our devotions. Let us be grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Let us weep when we remember Zion; and give the Lord no rest till he establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Indeed Christians ought to value intercession as a great advantage afforded them. They wish to relieve others; but how little can they do for the distressed personally! They long to be useful in the cause of their Lord and Saviour; but many of them are denied this luxury, as far as it depends upon office, talent, and wealth: but all have influence—all can pray—all have power with God—he despiseth not the prayer of the destitute, but will hear their prayer.

The Church here was fully aware of this; and we see the weapons, so to speak, with which the first Christians fought against their enemies and for their friends. If, says the Saviour, my kingdom was of this world, then would my servants fight—indeed they would, and shew that kind of courage which the many only admire. But his kingdom is not from hence: and therefore, though they do fight, the weapons of their warfare are not carnal, but spiritual, and mighty through God. They are submission, patience, tears, prayers.

The Church therefore thinks not of violence or resistance: yea, they do not draw up a petition and present it to Herod. They go at once, not to the jailer, but the Judge; not to the servant, but the Lord of all. They knew that Herod was under his control; and therefore prayer was made for Peter continually. The Lord exercises a twofold empire

over men. The one is spiritual and saving: when he enlightens and sanctifies them; and puts his laws into their minds; and writes them in their hearts. The other is providential: when, without converting them, he changes their purposes, or defeats their pursuits. Thus it is said, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, and he turneth it like the rivers of water;" which, led into another channel by the husbandman, retain the same qualities, and flow as freely as before. Nehemiah therefore did wisely when he wished to obtain a favour from Ahasuerus; "I prayed," says he, "unto the God of heaven:" and God disposed him to grant more than he could have requested. So Esau armed four hundred men, intending when he set off to kill Jacob: but Jacob wrestled in prayer; and having prevailed with God, he found no difficulty in succeeding with man. Accordingly his brother's mind, though not sanctified, was softened; and when they met they fell on each other's neck, and kissed each other—"When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Hezekiah went and spread the letter before the Lord, and prayed, and conquered Sennacherib upon his knees.

Let us, therefore, when we wish even to carry an enterprise with our fellow-creatures, engage the Lord on our side; and follow the admonition of David, who had often tried the measure and found it successful; "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." And the Church here found it to be true.

OCTOBER 14.—MORNING.

"And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains—and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands." ACTS xii. 6. 7.

How well is God characterized in the address of David; "O thou that hearest prayer!" "Ask," says he, "and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find." He never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain. It is impossible to read the Scripture and not see what an honour he has always put upon prayer. Indeed much of the Sacred History is only a record of its achievements. The deliverance before us was in answer to prayer, which was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him. But we may remark three things connected with the deliverance itself.

Observe the time when it was obtained—It was the very night preceding the day that Herod would have brought him forth to the people, like a wild beast, to be put to death for their entertainment. The Lord intended to hear their prayers from the beginning; but he suffered their faith and patience to be tried to the uttermost. A few hours more!—But before the morning the decree goes forth, Peter is released, and the Church like them that dream! He designed to relieve the woman of Canaan who cried to him so piteously on the behalf of her daughter; yet he exercises her with three repulsive discouragements

before he proclaimed her success. He had engaged to deliver the posterity of Abraham at the end of four hundred and thirty years; yet the last month, the last week, the last day of this period had arrived before the accomplishment of the promise: and if they are not rescued before the next dawn, the Divine bond is forfeited. But there is time enough for payment—"Even the self-same day it came to pass that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." Thus, even when he has determined to give, he holds his people in suspense; and he has reasons for his conduct. He is a God of knowledge, and blessed are all they that wait for him. These delays operate like the repulse of the Israelites from Ai; they lead to self-examination and inquiry. They tend to destroy creature-confidence. They induce us to receive the blessing with more notice and thankfulness. It is a great thing to be prepared for a mercy, as well as for a trial. But hope deferred maketh the heart sick—And here is the patience of the saints. Yet let them quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. Let them remember how long he waited for them—that he is a sovereign, and has a right to choose his own time—that his time is the best time—and that though he seems slow, he is sure. Cast not away, therefore, your confidence. Never despair, though Isaac be even bound, and laid on the altar, and the hand has seized the knife, and aimed the blow—

"Just in the last distressing hour
The Lord displays delivering power;
The mount of danger is the place
Where we shall see surprising grace."

Observe also the state in which, when the salva-

tion arrived, the subject of it was found—"He was sleeping between two soldiers." Asleep! in such a condition! in such company! in such a place! at such a time!—when there was only a step between him and his execution—when he was in the jaws of death! But his cause was good, his conscience clear, his mind kept in perfect peace, being stayed on God. Such a frame of soul would turn a prison into a royal chamber, and make a pavement of clay a bed of down, and enable the possessor to say, in the midst of danger, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me—"So thou givest thy beloved sleep." The Lord has comforts for his people answerable to every exigency, and as the sufferings abound, the consolation abounds also; so that they are often a surprise to themselves as well as to others: their new experience exceeding so much their former feelings, and falsifying their gloomy apprehensions. Yet this is only the fulfilment of the promise, "as thy days so shall thy strength be." Peter was one thing out of prison and another in it. He who trembled at the question of the damsel in the judgment-hall can now sleep so soundly as to require a blow to wake him, though in the morning he is to die in all the horrors of a public execution.

Again, let us observe the instrument employed in the rescue—"Behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him." And what marvellous beings are these messengers! They are called "his mighty angels;" and how well are they said to "excel in strength!" Peter seemed perfectly secured. He had been committed to no less than sixteen soldiers, who were to lose their lives if he escaped. Some of them even guarded the doors; but the angel easily enters without their

perceiving him. The prison was dark, but he finds his way to Peter. He was chained to a soldier on his right hand, and to another on his left. The angel strikes a light; smites him on the side; severs him from his fetters; tells him to arise, and put on his sandals, and follow him—without disturbing his keepers—and opens the gates, and sets him free to return to his praying friends. How little we can judge of the nature and agency of invisible beings! One thing however we know, that the highest of God's creatures are his people's servants. Though they are innumerable, and have among them thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, and the "least of them could wield these elements," "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" What monarch is attended in his journeys like the poorest, meanest child of God? "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

What right have Christians to despond? Is not he whom they serve continually able to deliver? Whatever be their straits and difficulties, he can find or make a way for their escape. That, at what time they are afraid, they may trust in him; he has not only given them exceeding great and precious promises, but he has taught and encouraged them by examples. They can remember the years of the right hand of the Most High; and they know that he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

OCTOBER 14.—EVENING.

"According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me."

HOSEA xiii. 6.

IN this and the former verse, God places Israel before us in two situations and conditions—The Wilderness, and Canaan. He reminds us of his knowledge of them in the former: and of their disregarding him in the latter. He commended them in their low estate; but had to complain of them in their prosperity—"I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought." But, delivered from the privations and hardships of the desert, they entered the land of promise: the glory of all lands; a land of wheat and barley; a land of vineyards, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land wherein there was no scarceness; a land flowing with milk and honey. And what was the consequence?

First. *Selfish indulgence*—"According to their pasture, so were they filled." And was this sinful? We plead for no monkish austerities. "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." He "giveth us richly all things to enjoy." But the enjoyment of Christians differs from the excess of the sensual. We are not to feast ourselves without fear. We are not to make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. We are not to throw the reins on the neck of appetite; and feed ourselves to the full. The mistake of many is, that they suppose everything is their

own; whereas nothing is their own. They are only stewards of the manifold grace of God. They think they may sleep as much as they like; dress as much as they like; and consume as much as they like: but the Scripture is our rule, and not our own inclination. There is the cause of God, and of the poor, to be thought of, as well as our own gratification. The first lesson in the school of Christ is self-denial—Where, in the lives of some, does this ever appear? Temperance is one of the graces of the Spirit—And does this consist only in avoiding the grossness of drunkenness and gluttony? No; but in not “*filling ourselves according to our pasture.*”

Secondly. Pride—“They were filled, and their *heart was exalted.*” This was even the case with Hezekiah: even *he* rendered not according to the benefits done him; for “his heart was lifted up.” And, by charging them that are rich in this world not to be “high-minded,” nor “to trust in uncertain riches,” the Apostle shews the tendency there always is in worldly success to gender vanity and false confidence. Hence it is said, “Pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.” They even think more highly of their understanding—as if their wisdom grew with their wealth. They speak with authority; and answer roughly.

Thirdly. Unmindfulness of God—“Therefore have they forgotten me.” And how common is it for men, in the midst of their sufficiency, to lose the sense of their obligations to God, and dependence upon him, and need of him? Hence Agar prayed against being rich; “lest I should be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?” Hence the cau-

tion to the Jews, at their taking possession of all the good things in Canaan: "Then beware lest thou forget the Lord which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." The admonition was unavailable. "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked. Thou art waxed fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation."

This gives us a very humbling view of human nature. Is it possible for us to consider it as so innocent, so amiable, so noble, as some would represent it to be? View it, not as it appears in the dregs of society, but as it is seen in common and reputable life. See men able to bear nothing without abuse—evil, because God is good—drawn from him, by the very things which should lead to him—ungrateful, in proportion as they should love and praise him—and even converting his gifts into weapons of rebellion against him! Lord, what is man?

Let the fact arouse us to caution and circumspection, if Providence smiles upon us, and we are placed in easy and agreeable circumstances. Yea, let us not only watch, but pray, lest we enter into temptation. Let us seek that grace which can alone enable us to manage a full estate properly, so as to elude its snares, and discharge its duties. Then we shall see that what is impossible to men, is possible to God. It was said of Vespasian, that he was even the better man for being an emperor. So there are some, whose prosperity, instead of destroying them, displays and increases their excellency; and they are not only rich in temporal things, but rich in faith, and rich in good works. These instances, however, are rare.

The perils of the condition should check our eagerness after worldly affluence and ease. Why do we envy those that rise? Because we attach an undue value and importance to their acquisitions. Yet these possessions are not only transient, but unsatisfying, and vexatious, and corrupting. Yet, regardless of the testimony of Scripture, and all history and experience, how many, and even professors of religion, crave and pursue them as if they were the supreme good! But seekest thou great things unto thyself? seek them not. Bring your mind to your condition; for you never will be able to bring your condition to your mind. Your desires will enlarge with your indulgence; as fuel adds to the fierceness of the flame—Therefore let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Learn also resignation under afflictive dispensations, either in crossing your schemes, or in reducing your resources. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." It was said of Moab, "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed." The Prodigal was more favoured—a famine drove him home. Manasseh was mercifully ruined—in his affliction he sought the Lord God of his father, and he was found of him. And He gives you the valley of Achor for a door of hope. Do not think hardly of Him, under whose discipline you now are. He knew your danger; and interposed to prevent it. He has hedged up your way with thorns:

but it is to keep you from following lying vanities, and forsaking your own mercies. He tries you; but it is for your profit. He sees what you can bear. And he who loved you, so as to give his own Son for you, will suffer you to want no good thing.

OCTOBER 15.—MORNING.

"And the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken."

DEUT. v. 28.

THUS he expressly mentions his having *heard* what they had *said* to Moses. It is equally true that he hears all we say; and has heard all we have ever said. This is a solemn thought; especially as he has heard all our words, not as an unconcerned auditor, but as a witness and a judge. How many of them have we forgotten! But they are all in the book of his remembrance. "For every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

Here, the words which God had heard were the words of religious avowal—"Speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and *we will hear it, and do it.*" And he has heard all our religious resolutions and engagements. First. Our more private ones; when we have been impressed alone—with regard to such a temper, that we should watch against it—with regard to such a

temptation, that we should pray for grace to resist it—with regard to our time, that we would redeem it—with regard to our substance, that we would honour the Lord with it. And, secondly, with regard to our more public and solemn ones: when we joined ourselves to his people; and went to his table; and, over the memorials, of dying love, said, "Henceforth by Thee only will I make mention of thy Name—

"Here, in thy house, I leave my vow,
And thy rich grace record;
Witness, ye saints, who hear me now,
If I forsake the Lord.'"

I have heard, says he, the voice of the words of this people. And adds, with approbation, containing in it complaint—"They have well *said* all that they have *spoken*." But talking and doing are two things. Even with regard to ourselves, one of them goes a very little way without the other—Yea, it rather offends—it adds insult to injury. We scorn a flattering profession, contradicted by actions—Actions, we say, speak louder than words. What is lip-service in religion! Judas gave our Lord the lip—called him master—and kissed him—and betrayed. Ezekiel's hearers extolled his preaching, and brought others to admire him: but their hearts went after their covetousness—They heard his words but did them not. So David testifies of these Jews—"When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned, and enquired early after God—Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouths, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they

wedfast in his covenant." And so here. They spoke well in expressing their readiness to hear and to do. But God, who knew them better than they knew themselves, immediately exclaimed—"O that there were such a heart in them!"

—Speech is one of the most uncertain criterions by which we can judge of character, either as to the reality or degree of religion. From education, reading, and hearing, persons may easily learn to talk well. They may even surpass others who are far better than themselves: as an empty vessel, when touched, sounds louder than a full one; and as a shallow brook is more noisy than a deep river. Some speak little, especially concerning themselves, from a fear of deception; and a concern lest they should appear to others above what they really are. Baxter, in his life of Judge Hale, says, For a time. I feared he was wanting in experimental religion, as he seldom spoke of his own spiritual views and feelings. But, upon better acquaintance, I found I was mistaken. He had heard, from many in his times, so much hypocrisy and fanaticism, that he was urged towards the extreme of silence. And it is the better extreme of the two. Christians feed on the hidden manna; and have a white stone, with a new name in it, which no one readeth save he that receiveth it. Would it not be better for some to talk less of their high confidence, and their wonderful ecstasies, before those who are weak in faith and comfort? and who are in danger of being depressed by comparison? How assuredly do some speak of the time when they were "enlightened," or "converted;" as if they could ascertain the period of the second birth as exactly as that of the first! Might it not, sometimes

at least, be better to speak of the fact with less decision? and always to consider the work, not so much done as doing; or to pray that it might be done? So did David—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

To how many individuals will the words before us apply! Here is a champion for the truth. He has defended its purity and importance. He has contended earnestly, and, as far as argument or evidence goes, wisely, for the faith once delivered to the saints. He has well *said* all that he has *spoken*. But where is the Spirit of truth? the meekness of wisdom? the mind of Christ? Every page of controversy ought to have over it, "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God;" and, at the bottom, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Another has entered the sanctuary of God, and, in language equally beautiful and true, has acknowledged, We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep—we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts—there is no health in us. And he has well *said* all that he has *spoken*. But where is the broken heart, and the contrite spirit? How often, after these confessions, is the sermon, founded upon them, disliked, and the preacher of it condemned! Here is a third. He has gone to his brethren in distress, and justified the ways of God to man. But does he justify God's dealings with himself in trouble? He has well *said* all that he has *spoken*—But he reminds us of the language of Eliphaz to Job—"Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upheld him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble

knock. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest: it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled."

Men may mistake themselves when they do not mean to deceive others. They are often, at the time, as sincere as they are earnest. The young, the afflicted, in the hour of distress—the sick, and the dying—express many things which are as true as they are good, according to their *present* feelings. But they do not distinguish between impulse and disposition; between outward excitement and inward principle. Hazael, at the prediction of his cruelties, ignorant of the change that power would produce in him, really execrated the character he became. Peter was presuming, but not false, when he said, Though all shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. The disciples supposed themselves established in the faith, beyond the danger of temptation to forsake him, when they said, "Now we believe." But Jesus answered them—O that there was such a heart in you!—"Do you now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

OCTOBER 15.—EVENING

"And his rest shall be glorious.—ISAIAH xi. 10.

We need not ask, *whose* rest is here spoken of; for there can be no uncertainty respecting the appropriation. The whole chapter is a prophecy or promise of the incarnation and kingdom of the Messiah; and the verse from which these words are taken is

expressly applied to him by Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, and there is no other that could verify and fulfil it but himself: "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious." But we may ask, what is this rest of his, to which is ascribed such an attribute, or such an abstraction; for the margin is, His rest shall be "glory"?

His rest includes that blessed state into which he entered after his mediatorial work on earth. Never was there such an enterprise as he had to accomplish: the execution of it would have been infinitely above the power of men and angels. But he could say to the Father, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." And what was the result? "He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his:" the one reposing after the redemption of the world, as the other did after the creation; and each thereby giving rise, as the Apostle remarks, to a Sabbath—the one to the seventh, and the other to the first day of the week. Who can imagine, so to speak, the refreshment and satisfaction of the Maker of all things, when he looked and "saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good"? So Jesus having obtained eternal redemption for us, for ever sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. There he dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him. There he possesses the joy that was set before him, for which he endured the cross. There he sees his seed, and prolongs his days, and the pleasure of the Lord prospers in his hand. There he sees of the travail of his soul and is satis-

fied. There, for the suffering of death, he is crowned with glory and honour; angels, principalities, and powers, being made subject unto him; and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and his rest is glorious—

His rest means his Church. "This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it." And, whatever the world may think, "In Judah is God known: his Name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion. There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey." The glory of the Church does not arise from multitude without character, from riches and pomp, from splendid buildings and magnificent ceremonies. What glory would there be in a community dignified with all that is pagan, and all that is popish, yet destitute of the truth as it is in Jesus, of spiritual worshippers, of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost? We read of the "Spirit of glory and of God" resting upon Christians. And the one explains the other. It is the Divine presence that ennobles as well as defends it: "I will be a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst of her." With him is the fountain of life, and in his light we see light. But if the Church of Christ be glorious now, how much more glorious will it be found in a period which we are persuaded is already begun, when its numbers, and graces, and usefulness shall be increased with "all the increase of God;" and the assurances upon which our longing hopes repose shall be fulfilled: "The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation."

"Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron." "I will make thee an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations"—His rest shall be glorious.

His rest also intends that repose into which he brings his followers. This rest indeed, as to its fulness and perfection, remains for the people of God in another life. And how glorious this will be exceeds the power of language to describe. Yet turn only to the representation of the angel to John. "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." But we which have believed do enter into rest: and how glorious are the earnest, the foretastes, the beginnings of it, even here—when the understanding is freed from the perplexities of error and doubt; and the conscience is pacified from the horrors of guilt and the torments of fear; and the heart is delivered from unattainable and vexatious desires; and the will no longer resists the pleasure of the Almighty with

regard to duty or events; and the mind is kept in perfect peace, being stayed upon God! The wicked are like the troubled sea, whose waves cast up mire and dirt; and what anxieties and disquietudes must men of the world feel, who have their portion in this life exposed to a thousand accidents and changes, and who have no confidence in God as presiding over all their concerns, so as to promote their welfare! But the believer's treasure is in heaven, beyond the reach of harm; and he knows also that all the ways of the Lord towards him are mercy and truth. He has cast all his care upon one who careth for him, and whose care is accompanied with infinite wisdom, power, and love. He therefore is careful for nothing, but feels a peace that passeth all understanding. His soul dwells at ease. He is satisfied with favour, and filled with the blessing of the Lord.

Such is the Saviour we preach! This is the rest wherewith he causes the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing! His followers may have tribulation in the world, but in him they have peace. He will more than make them amends for all their services and sufferings in his cause—Yea, he has done it already. What they have been required to give up they have willingly resigned, for he has blessed them with advantages and pleasures infinitely richer and sweeter. They have meat which others know not of; they have joy which strangers intermeddle not with. He is not only their physician, but their friend; not only their refuge, but their consolation.

But what shall we say to those who neglect so great salvation? Can creatures content the cravings of immortality? Can any earthly successes or indulgences give you heart-felt repose? Could the

whole world sustain and solace you when trouble comes? when your gourds wither? when your pulse intermits? and upon your eyelids sits the shadow of death? Such a moment will come; and then to whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your glory? But he cries, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden." Venture upon his gracious invitation; and he will give you rest—rest unto your souls—AND HIS REST SHALL BE GLORIOUS.

OCTOBER 16.—MORNING.

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."

JOHN xxi. 25

THIS is the language of the writer of this Gospel in concluding his narrative. After all that he had brought forward, much more remained behind. He had composed a memoir, rather than a history; and only furnished a few specimens of a subject, boundless in itself.

Yet the expression he employs in asserting this may seem to many surprising, if not confounding. There are two ways of solving the difficulty.

First. The language is a figure; a strong hyperbole. This was very common in the East. Indeed, it is frequent with writers and speakers in all countries. Even in our familiar discourse, we often, without being aware of it, express ourselves as remotely from truth, if *absolutely* considered—"I am

tired to death." "I have no strength left." "Every body knows it." Such a thing is—"provided at the shortest notice"—which would be a moment. But no deception is intended; and no danger of mistake follows.

Yet, secondly, though this meets the difficulty, some have also a little altered the rendering, and read—not, the world would not *contain*, but would not *receive*, the books that would be written. So Doddridge and others. This is allowable in criticism; but let us observe the justness of the inference. If all the particulars of his birth and infancy, and youth and manhood; if all the occurrences of his private and public life; if all his actions, his miracles, his speeches, his prayers, with all their relative circumstances; if all these had been recorded—instead of a book, we must have had books; and books so large, and many, that the design must have been counteracted. For then—there were no books but were in manuscript. And who would have had leisure to transcribe them? Who would have taken the trouble?—If they were purchased from transcribers, who would have endured the expense? They could only have been the property of the very rich.—And when they had become their own, who could have had time to read them? Who could have remembered them all? How multiplied would have been the difficulties requiring explanation! All these would have been, with men, reasons or excuses for not procuring, or not perusing, or not understanding, them.

Therefore each of the inspired lives of our Saviour himself is not so long as many a sermon. The four put together are far shorter than the published ac-

count of many a modern, insignificant character. But let us not complain, or lament that the whole is so compendious and brief. It is not a defect, but an excellency. The wisdom and goodness of God appear in it. It meets the more our situations; engagements; and capacities. More would only have perplexed us, or multiplied our diversions.

And let us remember also, that we do not want the aid of traditional supplement, or human additions, to the Scriptures of truth. Though short, they are sufficient. They leave nothing obscure, as to our duty, or welfare—They are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Christ Jesus.

And may we not suppose that it will be a part of our engagement and blessedness in heaven to derive from those acquainted with them, or from the Saviour himself, the knowledge of a thousand things concerning his eventful history, of which we are now ignorant?

Above all, let us rejoice in what has been furnished. Let us rejoice that it is so divinely proved—and that it has been preserved uncorrupted down to our own time—and that we have it in our own language—and are allowed—and able to read it. And let us keep the *end* of the whole in view, and never be satisfied till it be accomplished in our experience. "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life through his Name."

OCTOBER 16.—EVENING.

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

MATT. XXV. 34.

WHAT a delightful announcement! And how perfectly opposed to the tremendous sentence addressed by the King to them on his left hand: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." There, "ye cursed;" here, "ye blessed of my Father." There, "Depart from me;" here, "Come." There, "Depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;" here, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Observe the character: "*Ye blessed of my Father.*" Some bless themselves, and some are blessed by their fellow-creatures; but the great thing is to be blessed of God. How vain would be, in all our most important exigencies, the friendship of mortals, however kind or powerful they may be! But in his favour is life. Their blessing is wishes and words: his blessing is deeds and realities. In his blessing there is an actual communication: "He commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore:" and they whom he blesses are blessed, and none can reverse it—And how vain would the censure of the world be under the smiles of God! Let them curse, but bless thou!

But in what are they the blessed of his Father? It must be something peculiar and distinguishing. Temporal mercies they have in common with others. Even here indeed there is great difference as to efficiency and enjoyment. They have the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush in their comforts: and

because he "*blesses* the labour of their hand," and "*blesses* their bread and their water," therefore "a little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked;" for "the blessing of the Lord it maketh it rich" without abundance, and "he addeth no sorrow with it." But what says the glowing thanksgiving of the Apostle? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." He has redeemed them from the curse of the law; justified them from all things; called them by his grace. He feeds them with the bread of life; adorns them with the garments of salvation; and gives them the earnest and foretastes of immortality.

Observe the invitation: "*Come*, ye blessed of my Father." Men, if judged by their dispositions and actions, often say unto him, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." But what is now their desire will hereafter be their misery. Now they have diversions, but then they will be abandoned to thought, and feel themselves in a condition in which nothing could avail them but his friendship. Oh the dreadfulness in that day of being renounced for ever by him!—But what a heaven will there be in the sound, "*Come!*" The invited were once without him, and far from him; and hence their degradation and wretchedness. He pitied them even then, and was concerned to bring them to himself. He therefore said, *Come*, ye poor, and I will relieve you; *come*, ye sick, and I will heal you; *come* unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. *Come* to my cross; *come* to my throne; *come* to my house; *come* to my table; and

I will in no wise cast you out. And thus their intercourse with him began—and how is it carried on?—and how will it be completed? In the same way—"Come." Here they were made to feel their absolute need of him; here they sought him; here they often asked others, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" Here they also found him and enjoyed him—But all their desires and their hopes were not perfectly accomplished. Now they have reached the end of their faith, and are satisfied. "Come," says he, "come," to my immediate presence; "come," to my bosom; "come," and be for ever with the Lord—"Come, ye blessed of my Father."

Observe the induction: "*Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" Every word is significant. The *possession*. Not a mansion, an estate, a city, a province; but a portion more extensive and dignified, and suited to the highest ambition of the soul, a "kingdom." The *qualification*: "Prepared for you." It was not a natural portion, or an easy acquisition. How many things were to be removed, and how much was to be done and suffered, by an agency and passiveness the most illustrious! "I go," said he, "to prepare a place for you:" and his ascension was necessary, and his death was necessary, and his obedience was necessary, and his incarnation was necessary, and all the dispensations of his grace and providence were necessary to the full salvation of a soul. The *earliness* of the provision: "Before the foundation of the world." How impossible was it that we should be saved by works of righteousness that we had done! All was purposed, planned, promised, secured, not only without our desert, but without our desire, and ages and

ages before our existence—The grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

Observe the season of enjoyment: "*Then.*" Here they walk by faith, not by sight. If they build tabernacles here, they are soon taken down; and a voice is heard, "Arise, and depart hence, for this is not your rest." Every thing leads them forward. Now they sow in tears; then they reap in joy. Now will they run; then they obtain the prize. Now they fight the good fight of faith; then they will lay hold on eternal life. Now are they the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what they shall be. They are princes, but the world knoweth them not. Like David, they are anointed, but not crowned—But "*then* shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

And having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Let us walk worthy of him who hath called us unto his kingdom and glory. Especially let the prospect animate us in all our religious course. It was this language that influenced so powerfully the first Christians. They thought they always heard—and their faith, their conscience always did hear—"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And this enlivened them in duty. This raised them above worldly losses. This sustained them in every trouble, emboldened them in every conflict, and made them in all these things more than conquerors through him that loved them. Ah! said they, "our light affliction, which

is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

OCTOBER 17.—MORNING.

"It is high time to awake out of sleep." ROM. xiii. 11

THESE words regard Christians themselves. This is undeniable, from the motive subjoined : "For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Are *believers*, then, asleep? Not in the sense they once were—this would be impossible. But there are found, even in *them*, some remains of their former depravity. Though the good work is begun in them, it is far from being accomplished. While the bridegroom tarried, even the wise virgins slumbered and slept. Yes ; Christians, alas ! are often in a drowsy state ; and oftener in a drowsy frame. This is sadly reproachful. What ! drowsy, in examining themselves whether they be in the faith ? Drowsy, in praising the God of their salvation ? Drowsy, in seeking mercy and grace to help them in time of need ? Drowsy, in serving their generation by the will of God ? Are they not the disciples of Jesus ? Did he ever speak an idle word ? Did he ever lose a useful moment ? "I must work," said he, "the works of Him that sent me while it is day ; the night cometh, wherein no man can work."

Yet, if the address be proper for Christians, how

much more necessary is it for those who are entirely regardless of the things that belong to their peace ! Surely, for *them* "it is high time to awake out of sleep"—

—If we consider how long they have been sleeping. We ought to lament that we have lost *any* of our precious hours and opportunities. However short it may have been, the time past of our life should more than suffice, wherein we have lived to the will of man. What, then, should those feel, who have sacrificed the whole of their youth ? Perhaps the vigour of mature age ? What should those feel who, perhaps, have grown grey in the service of sin and the world ? The later we begin, the more zealous should we be to redeem the advantages we have lost ; and to overtake those who were wise enough to set off early. When Cæsar, in Spain, met with a statue of Alexander, he wept at the thought that this illustrious conqueror had achieved so much before *he* had even begun his career. High time,

—If we consider that the day is arrived, and the sun is risen so high. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand : let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." We can say more than the Apostle. The night *is* spent. The day is *fully come*. And we are all the children of the light, and the children of the day : we are not of the night, nor of darkness—*Therefore* let us not sleep as do others. They that sleep, sleep in the night. Look into nature. The sun ariseth, and man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening. The sun shines not for us to sleep, but to discharge the duties of our stations by its lustre. And why is the Gospel given us ? Why is our duty so

plainly made known, but that we may follow it? And why are the blessings of divine grace so clearly set before us, but that we may seek them? Our obligations always increase with our advantages. To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. And the servant that knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, shall be beaten with many stripes; for where much is given, much will be required. High time,

—If we consider the business they have to do. I am doing, said Nehemiah to some who would have interrupted him—I cannot come down to you—I am doing a great work. How much more may a Christian say this! He has an enterprise connected with the soul! and God! and eternity! Some things are desirable, and some are useful; but this is absolutely indispensable—

“Sufficient in itself alone;
And needful, were the world our own.”

Neglect, in many a concern, is injurious: but here it is ruinous—ruinous of every thing—and ruinous for ever. High time,

—If we consider the nature of the season in which this difficult and all-important work is to be accomplished. It is short; and there is but a step between us and death. It is uncertain in its continuance; and may be terminated every moment, by some of those numberless dangers, internal and external, to which we are exposed, and, once gone, it can never be renewed. No place will be found for repentance, though we seek it carefully with tears. High time,

—If we consider the danger they are in. If a man was sleeping in a house, and the fire was seen, not

only to be kindled, but raging over his apartment; or approaching rapidly his door; or ready to catch the very curtains of his bed; who would not think it high time for him to awake, and escape for his life? This is but a weak representation of the danger of sinners. They are condemned already. The wrath of God abideth on them. They are nigh unto cursing. Their end is to be burned. Their destruction is not only insured, but begun. And we are required to save with fear, pulling them out of the fire. High time to awake out of sleep,

—If we consider that all besides are awake. God is awake—Angels are awake—Glorified saints are awake—Brutes are awake—The children of this generation are awake—Devils are awake—Death is awake—Damnation is awake—Their damnation slumbereth not.—It is high time to awake out of sleep!

Is it not too late? Have I not reason to fear, that I have passed the bounds of Divine patience? that the Lord hath shut to the door? that, in resentment of my neglects and provocations, he hath given me over to a reprobate mind? that he hath poured upon me the spirit of slumber?—And hence it is that I hear so often with indifference, and that nothing affects me now as it once did!

But may I not hope, that his longsuffering will yet be my salvation? that he has spared me so long to afford space for repentance? that the seriousness of this retirement is another call of mercy? that the uneasiness, the dread, the desire I now feel, is a token for good?—that the lingering of pity still cries, How shall I give thee up?—Lord, save—I perish!

OCTOBER 17.—EVENING.

"There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

PHILEMON, 23, 24, 25.

THUS closes this short and very interesting Epistle, and which does so much honour to the humility, and kindness, and wisdom, and godliness of the Apostle. It ends with a salutation from his connexions, and a benediction from Paul himself.

The salutation regards Philemon, and comes from five persons mentioned by name.

The first is "Epaphras." He had been a faithful minister in the Colossian church, and did not forget them when he was absent from them, always labouring fervently for them in prayer, that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. He was now at Rome, and a sufferer with Paul; perhaps in the very same confinement, if not in the same cause. This cause was not the service of sin or sedition, but the Gospel of Christ: the Apostle therefore calls him "my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus."

The second is "Marcus." Not Mark the Evangelist, but John Mark. His mother had a house at Jerusalem, at which, when Peter was delivered from prison, the Church was praying. He was the nephew of Barnabas. He soon became a minister; and when Paul and his uncle returned from Jerusalem, Mark accompanied them as far as Perga in Pamphylia: but feeling or fearing the difficulties and dangers of his work, he there departed from them, and returned home. This was doubtless improper conduct, and

some time after gave rise to a sad dispute between Paul and Barnabas; the one being willing to take him again along with them, the other refusing, because of his former defection. Perhaps both of these great and good men were a little to blame, the one being too partial, and the other too severe. However this may be, Mark was afterwards not only received by Paul, but recommended to the Colossians—"If he come unto you, receive him;" and to Timothy, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry." He also was now at Rome with him. He had acknowledged his fault and been reformed, and we are not to break a bruised reed, nor to reject a returning backslider. If a brother be overtaken in a fault, they who are spiritual should endeavour to restore him. Many a character has been given up too soon. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were afraid to act an open part at first; but they came forward and honoured the crucified Savior when all his disciples forsook him and fled.

The third was "Aristarchus." He was a Macedonian. He became a zealous Christian, and attended Paul to Ephesus, where, in the tumult raised by Demetrius the silversmith, he narrowly escaped with his life. He accompanied Paul in his return to Greece; waited for him at Troas; journeyed with him into Asia; and sailed with him to Rome, where he now was, and probably involved in the persecution of Paul, for in his Epistle to the Colossians the Apostle calls him his "fellow-prisoner."

The fourth was "Demas." At this time therefore he was a professor of Christianity, and probably a preacher of the word. But when Paul wrote his Second Epistle to Timothy he says, "Demas hath

foraken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica." We are not informed whether he was drawn away by the attraction of pleasure, fame, or wealth. It was probably the latter. "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Why should we be scandalized at apostacies like these? Did they not attend Christianity from the beginning? Were they not found in the purest state of the Church? They go out from us because they are not of us. Evil men and seducers may wax worse and worse: "nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his."

The last is "Lucas." He was "the beloved physician." By his skill he could render himself useful even to the bodies of men: and to the honour of the profession be it observed, that we have always found men of this learned and liberal order the most ready to exercise self-denial and beneficence in the service of suffering humanity. But Luke employed himself also in writing. He was the third evangelist; and compiled the Acts of the Apostles. Of the last four of these five saluters of Philemon it is observable, that Paul calls them "his fellow-labourers." The name is sometimes applied to those who are not expressly ministers of the word. He calls Priscilla and Aquilla his "helpers in Christ;" and speaks of "those women who laboured with him in the Gospel." He does not mean that they taught publicly in the church, a

practice which he had forbidden: but there are many ways in which we may be fellow-helpers to the truth, consistently with every other duty. But the term is more usually significant of those who laboured in word and doctrine; and it is probable that this was the case with each of these individuals.

But let us observe the benediction of Paul himself. This is more extensive than the salutation. The salutation is addressed to Philemon only; but this takes in his wife Apphia, and Archippus his fellow-soldier, and the church in his house; and therefore he says, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with *your spirit*." If there be one word which was dearer to Paul than another, it was the word "grace." Indeed we may call it the darling word of Inspiration. But why is it named the grace "of *our Lord Jesus Christ*"? Because by his obedience and death he was the medium of its extension to the children of men. And because also he is the source of its residence: it hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. Hence we are commanded to be strong "in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Hence it is said, "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

But why does the Apostle say, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with *your spirit*"? Because this is the principal seat of all real religion. Out of this are the issues of life. And therefore it is said, "Take heed to your spirit." We are no longer in a right state than while we are in "a right spirit;" and this—and the Apostle perfectly knew it—is, and can be no further right than as it is possessed and influenced by this grace. This grace will make it a spirit of faith, a spirit of love, a spirit of adoption.

This grace will lead it into all truth, and prepare it for every duty. This grace will enable it to resist temptation, to bear prosperity, to endure affliction, to triumph in death. The Apostle knew that fresh supplies of it were necessary : but he knew also, not only from his own experience, but from the declaration of the Saviour himself, that it was equal to every season, every condition, every exigency ; for he had said to him and to every believer, " My grace is sufficient for thee." This therefore he deemed the most important endowment he could wish for his friends. Had he known any thing more valuable, he would have implored it on their behalf. But he knew grace was the best gift. He knew that nothing would be a blessing without, he knew that every thing could be a blessing with it. He knew that it was profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Let us seek it for our connexions. Let us seek it for ourselves—The reality of it, if we have it not,—and the abundance of it, if we have. " Amen."

OCTOBER 18.—MORNING.

" He will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints : but let them not turn again to folly." PSALM LXXXV. 8.

How encouraging is this *expectation* !—" He will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints."

Mark the blessing itself—*Peace*. It does not mean outward ease and prosperity. He, nowhere engaged to speak this ; but spiritual comfort ; the

composer of the conscience; the satisfaction of the heart: by which the "*soul shall dwell at ease:*" the effect of confidence in God: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." How relieving is it, under a sense of guilt, to believe in the blood that cleanseth from all sin! How soothing is it, in the various changes of life, to be assured that all things shall work together for our good! How confirming is it, in the prospect of every duty, to know that his strength shall be made perfect in weakness! This is the rest wherewith we are to cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing.

Observe the author of the communication—*He* will speak peace. And unless *He* speaks it, it will be spoken in vain. Friends may address us—but they will be found miserable comforters. Ministers may attempt to bind up the broken heart—but they will prove physicians of no value. Ordinances may be regarded—but they will be wells without water, and clouds without rain. But "when *He* giveth quietness, then who can make trouble?"—We can only implore, or announce peace: but his word produces, conveys it. *He* commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore. Nothing is beyond the reach of *Him* who turneth the shadow of death into the morning.

Observe the heirs of the privilege—*He* will speak peace to his *people*, and to his *saints*. These are not different characters, but different representations of the same persons; and the one is explanatory of the other. *He* has a people for his name: and if we ask, who they are, we are told they are saints: that is, they are holy ones. They are not perfectly

but they are really so. The principles of sanctification, of which they are the partakers, will soon gain the entire possession of them; but even now they have the ascendancy in them. The love of holiness is evinced, even with regard to their remaining corruptions. These are their burden and distress; and for these they abhor themselves. They long, above all things, to walk so as to please God; and constantly pray, Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.—And what have others to do with peace? “There is no peace, saith my God, unto the wicked.”

Mark also the certainty of the assurance—He *will* speak peace unto his people, and to his saints. Every thing tends to confirm it. His name—He is the God of peace. His thoughts—they are thoughts of peace. The mediation of the Son of his love—He made peace by the blood of his Cross. His dealings with us—Had he a mind to kill us, he would not have shewn us such things as these. The truth of his word—The Scripture cannot be broken.

And how reasonable is the *caution*!—“But let them not turn again unto folly.”

—Here we see the character of sin: it is folly. Such the God of truth pronounceth it to be now. Such every transgressor will acknowledge it to be at last. Should not this be enough to deter us from it—that it perfectly befools us? and will fill us with everlasting shame and contempt?

—Here we are reminded that the people of God, though saints now, were once chargeable with it—The command, not to *turn again* to folly, proves this. Their being *made to differ*, supposes former sameness. They were by nature children of wrath, even

as others: and they are willing to own it: and often look to the rock whence they were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence they were digged.

—We are also taught that they are still in danger; and need warning. Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. We are always exposed to a subtle and invisible enemy: we live in a wicked world; we carry within us an evil heart. The best, in an hour of temptation, have turned again to folly.

But against this we should feel ourselves peculiarly concerned to guard, *when* God has appeared for us, and spoken peace to our souls. Were we not, we should be alike ungrateful and infatuated. *Ungrateful*; for the more he does for us, the more anxious should we be, lest we offend and grieve his Holy Spirit. *Infatuated*; for, having known the evil of sin, and the bitterness of repentance, and the joy of God's salvation, shall we again cause him to hide his face from us? and wrong our own souls? For the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.

OCTOBER 18.—EVENING.

"He will subdue our iniquities." MICAH vii. 19.

THE language is expressive of joyful confidence. But the allusion is military, and well accords with the experience of every partaker of Divine grace who finds the spiritual life a warfare. The adversaries to be subdued are their "iniquities." They have enemies without, but their worst enemies are within. Even the world and the devil could do them

little hurt without the assistance of these treacherous inmates. In this sense, a man's foes are they of his own house. But are not their iniquities enemies to others as well as to Christians? They are, and will be found so in the end; but at present others are deluded by them, and take pleasure in them. Whereas Christians have been awakened and enlightened to see their condition while led captive by them, and have been led to throw off their yoke, and to declare war against them, a war the most trying and awful, a war that admits of no accommodation, a war that must end in our victory or destruction.

But are they not already delivered from these enemies? Does not the Apostle thank God that they are "made free from sin, and become the servants of righteousness?" They are made free from its tyranny. It no longer reigns in their mortal body that they should obey it in the lusts thereof—Yet it lives, and resists, and often alarms them into a dread of being again overcome—"Mine iniquities prevail against me." But the apprehension is groundless. Sin shall not have dominion over them; for they are not under the law, but under grace. The Lord is on their side. Their friend, their helper, their conqueror, is Divine—"He shall subdue our iniquities." Who is the agent? "Not by might, or by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." Here is the only real Sanctifier: and therefore we read, that "through the spirit we mortify the deeds of the body;" that "we have purified our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit;" that "we live in the Spirit," and "walk in the Spirit." What are the means? The principal instrumentality is faith. Some

imagine that faith is rather opposed to holiness but there is no true holiness without it. Abraham, who believed God, is distinguished pre-eminently for obedience: and he who has the faith of Paul will never want the works of James. Faith in the blood of Jesus, faith in the promises of God, that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen; that faith alone enables us to stand in the evil day. This faith purifies the heart—The “sanctified,” says the Saviour, “by faith that is in me.” All the ordinances of religion are called means of grace, because in the use of them we receive “the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Under the blessing of God, the dispensations of Providence conduce to the same end. Afflictions, which are the effects of sin, are made “the fruit to take away sin.” Creature comforts are often to the soul what suckers are to the tree; and the heavenly Husbandman prunes us, to secure the sap for the bearing. We are tried, that we may come forth from the furnace as gold; losers indeed, but gainers by the loss, deprived only of what injured our excellence and rendered more valuable and useful.

But in what manner is the work accomplished? The Lord could at once execute the blessed deliverance; but as the Canaanites were driven out by little and little, so he gradually subdues our iniquities. Hence we read of “the inward man being renewed day by day;” and of our being “changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.” We must therefore distinguish between the commencement and the finishing of this

glorious renovation. It will not be completed till death, but it is now begun ; and the very complaints of the believer are proofs that he is not what he once was, but approves things that are excellent, and delights in the law of God, and feels his remaining corruptions to be his burden and grief. Simon Brown, formerly a minister of the Gospel in London, was so enervated and depressed as to believe that his soul was annihilated, and that he had no more soul than a horse. Yet he continued praying and preaching, and publishing, as if he had two souls, instead of having none ; his reasonings abundantly disproving all their conclusions. Thus we have met with Christians who imagined they had no grace, while they lived so conscientiously and consistently, mourned for sin so deeply, prized the Scriptures so highly, and loved the Lord Jesus so fervently, that they seemed to every one but themselves to have a double portion of the Spirit. When a man is nailed to the cross, he may linger on for a while, but his doom is fixed ; and “our old man is crucified.” A tree, after it is plucked up by the roots, has some sap left in it, and will even throw out shoots ; but we know that in such a case it *cannot* revive : the radical, essential support is cut off—It *must* wither and die. Let us thank God and take courage. The conflict may be protracted, and we may be sometimes ready to faint : but there is nothing doubtful in the issue ; and the result is not more glorious than sure.

OCTOBER 19.—MORNING.

"Seeing many things, but thou observest not."

ISA. xlii. 20.

THIS charge is as applicable to us, as it was to the Jews. Nothing is more common than the want of wise and proper *observation*. The objects and events adapted to excite it, and which would also reward it, are various and numberless. And some of them daily and hourly strike our senses; yet they engage none of our notice and attention, as rational and moral beings. From an immense multitude let us select two of these occurrences, by way of example—The birth, and the death, of our fellow-creatures.

How little attention is excited by the birth of a child! It may perhaps, if it takes place in respectable life, be announced in the paper—inquiries may be made concerning its sex and form—it may be viewed and embraced by the friends who call ceremoniously on the mother who has been delivered. But what moral or religious reflection is ever indulged by those who are informed of the event? or even by the parents themselves? The interesting sufferer herself may be pleased with the congratulations paid her; and forget her anguish for joy that a man is born into the world; and feel a lively gratitude for the mercy she has experienced: but no one thought may arise in the mind respecting the all-important result, in the production of a new being—and such a being too!—Yet the birth of a child can scarcely be deemed less than a miracle of Nature and Providence. That child is a piece of Divine workmanship, fearfully and wonderfully made: and as fearfully and wonderfully preserved and endowed.

When the Creator made it, he did a far greater thing than when he made the sun. The sun is a mass of unintelligent matter. It sees not its own light. It feels not its own heat; and is not destined to shine and burn for ever. But there is a spirit in that child; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. He is a moral being. He is the subject of reason and conscience. These principles are not yet developed; but they are lodged in him. They are in him, as the flower is in the seed; and the oak in the acorn. He is an heir of immortality; and though his existence began yesterday, it will never, never end. He will hear the heavens pass away with a great noise, and see the elements melt with fervent heat. He will stand before the judgment-seat of Christ; and go away into everlasting punishment, or into life eternal.

He is also to be viewed relatively, as well as personally. And what an awful interest does he acquire from the evil he may occasion, as well as suffer! and from the good he may produce, as well as experience! He may prove a viper in the bosom that feeds him; a disgrace to his family; a curse to the nation. Many may be vitiated by his example, and led into hell by his influence. One sinner destroyeth much good. Or he may make a glad father; and prove a blessing to the neighbourhood; and serve his generation by the will of God; and levy a tax of gratitude on future ages. Who that had seen Isaac Watts in the arms of his mother, sitting at the door of the prison in which his father was suffering for conscience' sake, could have divined that this precious babe was the sweet Psalmist of the Christian Israel; and that the little hand that stroked her cheek, was ordained to

hold the pen that should instruct and edify the world to the end of time! Had we heard when the babe wept, and looked into the ark of bulrushes, we should have seen the scholar, learned in all the wisdom of Egypt; the scourge of Pharaoh; the deliverer of the Hebrews; the king in Jeshurun; the lawgiver and the prophet of the Lord, with whom he spake face to face. What says the Lord of all? "Despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my heavenly Father."

Let us pass to the second article—Death. This is perpetually taking place around us: yet how little it is noticed was long ago remarked by Eliphaz: "They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever, without any regarding it." This indifference is one of the most astonishing things in a world of wonders; especially when taken in connexion with those consequences, that, in general belief, are supposed to result from it. If a tower fell; if a mountain was swallowed up by an earthquake; we should notice, and make it the subject of conversation for days and weeks—Yet, what is this compared with the removal of a fellow-creature; detached from all union with visible nature; excluded from every thing that once pleased or engaged him below the sun; severed from all his endeared connexions; his flesh seeing corruption; while his soul has entered into an entirely new state of existence, in immediate and perceptible communion with the Lord of all! Death is the most serious and momentous event that can befall the children of men. For it is not the extinction of being, but only the termination of one mode of it, and the commencement of another: the

transition from time to eternity; from a course of action to the sentence of retribution. When the dust returns to the dust, whence it was, the spirit returns to God, who gave it: and then the Divine fiat runs, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

And yet who considers it? When the bell tolls, we hardly ask whose doom it announces. When we see a funeral in the street, we scarcely look towards it, unless it be accompanied with the pomp of mortality. We see new names on the doors of the houses; but we pass without thinking that the places which once knew the owners know them no more for ever. A neighbour dies, and, from civility, we attend the burial, and lend him our last assistance; but return into the busy or trifling concerns of life as careless as before. Death enters our own dwelling—we feel deeply; but we reflect slightly. We mourn our loss; but the heart is not made better: we miss them for a time; but we soon furnish substitutes, or grow insensible to the want of them. When every duty the utmost decorum can exact, or the most perfect affection dictates, is discharged towards the deceased, where is the concern of the living to derive from the decease itself the spiritual profit which it is designed to yield? Where is the earnestness of the prayer, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom"?

Every death—the death of the young, and the death of the old; the death of the rich, and the death of the poor; the death of the saint, and the death of the sinner—has something, not only serious, but ap-

propriate, to impart. But to the generality of mankind, each of them says nothing—or speaks in vain.

Much of this disregard is from the frequency of the occurrence. Nothing seems to affect us strongly, but what is sudden or rare. The most important object, and the most interesting events, when they become familiar, awaken neither wonder nor attention. Yet, if we cannot regulate our impressions we can govern our ideas; we can apply our thoughts to any subject we please; and we should not suffer what is so full of instruction to pass without just reflection. We cannot be always thinking of death; but we should never be so absent from a proper condition of mind as not to be easily recalled to the improvement of an event which must soon happen to all; and for which we may prepare, though we cannot prevent.

It is not only the commonness of the subject, but our aversion to it, that keeps us from attending to it. It is, above all things, irksome to flesh and blood: we, therefore, are always endeavouring to put the evil day far away. But since we cannot put it off, let us pray for that *grace* which will turn the enemy into a friend, and the curse into a blessing. Then to die will be gain; and, we may live rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.

“If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise think on these things.”

OCTOBER 19.—EVENING.

“David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite.”

2 SAM. vi. 10.

It was a solemn and awful appeal David made, when “he swore unto the Lord, and vowed unto the

mighty God of Jacob; Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." Accordingly, as soon as he was fully enthroned over all Israel, he resolved to bring up the ark from Gibeah, where it had long been, and place it in Jerusalem, where it would be publicly accessible. But at first the enterprise more than failed. The appointed and prescribed mode of conveying the ark was on the shoulders of the Levites. On the present occasion this was strangely and very culpably overlooked. It was carried in a new cart; and it was driven by Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab. "And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of firwood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." The event seems mysterious. His judgments are a great deep. But will not the Judge of all the earth do right? We are sure there is no unrighteousness with God. We know also that he alone is the adequate judge of moral conduct. By him actions are weighed. He sees them in their principles and motives; and unerringly estimates the circumstances of extenuation, or aggravation attached to them. Let us give him time, and we shall be constrained to acknowledge,

"Thou art justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest."

David was both *displeased* and *terrified*. His displeasure was very censurable. Did it become him to resent what God had done, and be angry because the breach had defeated his plan, and disappointed his expectation—especially, too, when all this would have been prevented, had he consulted the law, and conformed to it? But so true is it, "a man's foolishness perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord." His terror was more excusable, and might have been salutary. "God will be known by the judgments which he executeth." When he strikes some, he intends that others should hear and fear, and turn unto the Lord. And it is well for us to feel our unworthiness and desert; and to inquire whether we who are spared are not equally guilty with those who are cut off—and also whether, though spared now, we shall always escape? Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall.

But David's alarm was servile and excessive. He therefore broke up the assembly, and began his return home, saying, "How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" "So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite." The event to Obed-edom was wholly unexpected. Little did he imagine, when he arose in the morning and joined the holy procession, that before he retired to rest his house would be the tabernacle of the Lord, towards which the eyes and thoughts of all the pious would be turned, and his name be had in everlasting remembrance. So Saul

went out to search for his father's asses, and before he returned was anointed king over Israel. When David was carrying provender to his brethren in the camp, how little did he dream that in the course of a few hours he should be the conqueror of Goliath, and the deliverer of his country, and hear it shouted, "Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands!" As to evil or as to good, we never know what a day may bring forth; and therefore we should never presume or despair. We talk of novels and romances; but we need not have recourse to fiction. What marvellous coincidences diversify actual life! "Time and chance happen to all." Nothing is indeed casual with regard to God. He sees the end from the beginning; and works all things after the counsel of his own will: and his providence is so universal and minute, that a sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father; and the very hairs of our head are all numbered. But what is appointment with him is contingency with us. The most important and interesting occurrences in our individual histories are often peculiarly accidental: in review, they appear surprising; and in prospect, had they been announced, would have seemed improbable, if not impossible—"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

Obed-edom's compliance was very praiseworthy. How many, had they been placed in his circumstances, would have declined the reception of the ark! Some would have pleaded danger—They could not

live under the same roof with this mysterious and dreadful symbol, which had killed Uzzah, who only touched it, and smote so many of the Beth-shemites who only looked into it. Some would have felt the expense it might entail. Some would have excused themselves on the ground of trouble—"multitudes will be constantly repairing hither, either from devotion or curiosity. The house will be a thoroughfare. We shall find it necessary to engage doorkeepers"—But if any of these thoughts occurred, they had not a moment's weight with Obed-edom. Providence, says he, has laid this service in my way—It is the call of God—I seize with gladness an opportunity afforded me to shew my love to his service, and to exercise self-denial for his sake.

And what was the consequence? Had he reason to repent of the forwardness of his zeal? The ark, says our Henry, is a guest that always pays well for its entertainment. And what says the sacred historian? "And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite, three months; and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household."

OCTOBER 20.—MORNING.

"Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty." ISA. xxxiii. 17.

WHAT was the sight of Hezekiah, released from his affliction, and appearing cheerfully in his royal robes to his subjects, after the destruction of the Assyrian army, compared with another sight! "We see Jesus, who, for the suffering of death, was crowned with glory and honour." Some, in the days of his flesh, with their bodily eyes beheld his glory.

And perhaps we are ready to envy them the privilege. But this sight of him was not accompanied with salvation—"Ye also," said he, "have seen me, and believed not:" and to those who were then before him he complained, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life."

On the other hand, there is a substitute for this sight of him; and it is infinitely more available—And he is the subject of it, who sees him, not with the eye of the body, but with the eye of the mind; not with the eye of sense, but with the eye of faith—"He that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, hath everlasting life." There is a spiritual perception of him, as much distinguished from common knowledge as the taste of a thing is from the report of it. Thus the Apostle says, "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me:" and, speaking of all Christians as well as of himself, he adds, "He hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

This sight of the Saviour will be evinced by certain effects. Self will be lowered. What can he think of his own excellencies who has been at the court above, and seen the king in his beauty! Self-admiration and self-dependence will then be at an end. "The proud look shall be humbled, and the lofty looks shall be laid low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." So it was with Job—"Now mine eye-seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, repenting in dust and ashes." So it was with Isaiah—"Woe is me, for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." The world will fade away, and lose

its charms. The Sun of righteousness will shine it out; as the luminaries of the night disappear in the effulgence of day. Attachment will result from it. Love enters by the eye. And faith is the same to the soul as this sense is to the body: therefore to them "that believe he is precious." He "dwells in the heart by faith." There will also necessarily arise a desire after more acquaintance and intercourse with him. Thus Paul, not because he was ignorant of him, but because he knew him, said, "That I may know him." There will also be an earnest desire to recommend him to others. As soon as Andrew knew him, he found his brother Simon, and brought him to Jesus. So did Philip his friend Nathanael. And so did the woman of Samaria her fellow-citizens.

This sight of him is a very distinguished privilege. As it is said of his immediate followers, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord;" so we, believing, rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. There is enough in him, perceptible to the view of faith, to induce us to rejoice in the Lord *always*. But how delightful is the sight of him in the hour of *conviction*! A drowning man, seeing a deliverer in a boat, hastening to his assistance: a debtor, on his way to prison, seeing a surety at hand to undertake for him: a man, dying of hunger, seeing the most delicious food—never saw what I saw, when, sensible of my state and danger, and feeling myself ready to perish, my heart revived at the view of such a Saviour, in his suitableness to my condition, in his all-sufficiency for my relief—and I was enabled to hope in his mercy.

How delightful is the sight of him in the hour of *desertion*! If he withdraws from me, it is not to

shew his sovereignty, but to correct for sin: and when he hides his face I am troubled. Then creatures are all miserable comforters. Then I sigh, O that it was with me as in months past! Then I pray, Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation—But when he appears and smiles again, it is more than the joy of morning, after a darksome night; or of spring, after the dreariness of winter.

How delightful is the sight of him in the hour of *trouble*? It is then, when our purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of our hearts; when enemies oppose; when friends fail and betray; when health declines—It is then we look towards him who is the consolation of Israel, and say, "This same shall comfort us:" "This man shall be the peace when the Assyrian cometh into the land."

How delightful is the sight of him in the hour of *death*! It loosened Simeon from all below, and made him more than willing to depart; wishing, now he had seen him, to defile, to vex his eyes with nothing else. And how many have since said,

"Jesus, the vision of thy face
Hath overpowering charms:
Scarce shall I feel death's cold embrace,
If Christ be in my arms!"

Such are the influence and the blessedness of a sight of him, by faith, here. What then is heaven? "His servants shall serve him; and they shall see his face." "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, to behold my glory." How superior will that sight be to all our present apprehensions of him! It will be clear. It will be ceaseless. It will be uninterrupted. It will

be perfect. It will be immediate. Whatever we have read or heard of him before, we shall then exclaim, with the Queen of Sheba, at the sight of Solomon, "The half was not told me!"

OCTOBER 20.—EVENING.

"He doth devise means that his banished be not expelled from him."

2 SAM. xiv. 14.

SOME emblems of this appeared under the Law. Many persons ceremonially unclean were banished for a time from the camp, the city, and the sanctuary; but means were ordained and prescribed for their cleansing, their release, and their restoration. But let us look at the conduct of God towards his people in the means he devises for their redemption, their conversion, their recall from backsliding, and their removal home.

Man was made after the image of God. God delighted in him, and held communion with him. He was perfectly holy, and perfectly happy: the heir of immortality, and the lord of all in this lower world. These views of man only serve to enhance his fall, and make his loss so much the more deplorable. He is not now what he originally was. Adam was banished from paradise; and cherubim, with a flaming sword, were placed to prevent his return to the tree of life. And we were banished in him—In Adam all died. We were deprived of the favour and presence of God; and separated from the supreme good; and resembled traitors, who having forfeited their right to their former abode and possessions, wander exiled from place to place, not daring to appear where once they lived, lest they should be

apprehended and executed. What a state was this to be in! But it was not of God that his banished should be expelled from him. He desired not the death of sinners; and therefore he devised means to deliver them from the sentence of condemnation, and to bring them back to his favour and presence. And what were these means? They were such as evinced not only his clemency, but shewed that he was rich in mercy—We could never have found out, and all the principalities and powers above could never have found out, a way for our return to God, consistently with all the perfections of his nature. But *his* understanding is infinite. O the depth both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! He forms a plan in which he abounds towards us in all wisdom and prudence: a plan which angels desire to look into; a plan, the development of which will draw forth the praise and wonder of eternity; a plan in which goodness and justice shine forth with equal beams; in which mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other; in which, while he redeems Jacob, he glorifies himself in Israel; in which, while the guilty are pardoned, the law is fulfilled, and magnified, and made honourable; in which, while there is peace on earth and goodwill towards men, there is glory to God in the highest. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us unto himself by Jesus Christ."

Redemption however is one thing; salvation is another. We have seen what God has done to bring us out of our guilty state: but we must also be brought out of our depraved state. We are darkness; how are we made light in the Lord? We are the servants of sin; how are we turned from the power

of Satan unto God? The grand agency is the influence of the holy Spirit: and hence we read of our being born of the Spirit, and being led by the Spirit; and we are assured that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But among the means devised for our conversion is the dispensation of the word by preaching: "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." There is not only a great and obvious adaptation and suitableness in this instrumentality to the purpose designed, but it is the ordinance of God's own appointment: and is therefore entitled to his blessing. Accordingly faith cometh by hearing. In the beginning of the Gospel, and in every revival of it since, the work has been principally accomplished by preaching. Were any given number of converted individuals now living to tell what God had done for their souls, how many of them would ratify this truth! One would say, I had not a serious thought of God, or of my soul, before such a sermon, like a clap of thunder, awakened my sleeping conscience. A second would say, I was a Pharisee, trusting in myself that I was righteous, and despising others, till such a discourse, like a scythe, mowed down all my legal hopes, and made me cry for mercy. A third would say, I was walking according to the course of this world, spending my money for that which is not bread, and my labour for that which satisfieth not, till such an address urged me to forsake the foolish, and live, and go in the way of understanding—But we do not limit the Holy One of Israel. There is hardly any thing but the Lord has

dignified by making use of it in the calling of sinners to himself. Afflictions, as we see in the case of Manasseh ; parental example ; the admonition of a friend ; the reading of a good book, of a mere tract—Where shall we end ? “ Lo ! all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.”

After they are brought to God by converting grace, his people are not suffered to apostatize from him. But they may backslide. Their faith may fail in the exercise, though not in the principle. Their love may wax cold. They may grow indifferent to the service of God, and rarely and lifelessly attend the means of his appointment. Yea, they may yield to temptation, and fall into sin, and cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of. And what is the consequence ? The Lord hides his face, and they are troubled—“ O that it was with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness ; while as yet the Almighty was with me.” The loss and the remembrance of their former peace and joy ; galling reflections from their own minds ; brotherly rebukes ; outward trials and disappointments—these are the means he employs to bring them back to himself from whom they have revolted, and who is yet saying, Return, ye backsliding children—I will heal your backslidings.

Yet as long as they remain here they are from home. This is not their rest. But there remaineth a rest for the people of God. And he has devised means to remove them from the kind of exile in which they now are to their own country, from whence they

were born, and whither they long to return. He has appointed an hour in which they are to depart out of the world unto the Father. Death is the way, and, however trying, the right way to the city of habitation. By death their banishment is entirely ended, and their restoration perfected for ever. "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more: neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

OCTOBER 21.—MORNING.

"O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!"

DEUT. v. 29.

HERE we see the character of real religion. The seat of it is the *heart*—The principle of it is the *fear of God*—The expression of it is *keeping his commandments*; all of them; and *always*.

We have also the benefit resulting from it. The good is personal—that it might be well with *them*. And relative—and with their *children*. And durable—*for ever*.

But how lovely does God appear in the concern he

here expresses! "O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!"—It is the language of complaint. It is as much as to say, "But I do not find it so." Is he then disappointed? Not as to fact, for he knows all things. But he is as to right. Surely he may justly expect from us an attention to his voice, and the improvement of the means and advantages with which we are favoured. And when he meets with nothing of this, he has reason to complain—And this is his meaning, when he says, "What more could have been done for my vineyard, and I have not done it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" "These three years I came seeking fruit, and finding none."

It is the expression of desire. We are aware that when the Scripture ascribes human attributes and feelings to God, they must be understood according to the perfection of his nature. They cannot mean precisely the same in him as they do in us. Yet there is always a *truth* which is the basis of all such metaphorical representations. And a slavish adherence to systematic divinity has much injured some of the finest passages of Revelation; and which were intended to be felt rather than criticised. Let it not therefore be objected, that "our God is in the heavens, he hath done whatsoever he pleaseth;" and asked, "Who hath resisted his will?"—This is his own language, "O that there was such a heart in them!" "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments; then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness like the waves of the sea!" "How often would

I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Yes; these are his own words—the expression of a God that cannot lie. This affords me every encouragement I want. Unworthy as I am, I see that he does not abandon me. He is willing to save me. He is waiting to be gracious. He is exalted to have mercy upon me. What is the inability of men to harmonize such declarations with some other parts of their creed to the oath of the living God!—"As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth: wherefore turn, and live ye."

It is the dictate of parental solicitude. It is the voice, not of a severe legislator or judge, but of a Father; a Father who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; a Father who does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; a Father who says, of the refractory child, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together;" a Father who says of the relenting, self-bemoaning child, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." How often does he assume this relation, in order to deprive his greatness of terror; and to render it our encouragement and our confidence! And not only has he said, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him;" but he has taken for an image of his tenderness the heart of a mother—and surely all that is parental indwells there:

"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" She may. Ah! ye mothers, your affection is ice, your heart is iron, compared with his—"Yet will I not forget thee."

Surely "he that loveth not, knoweth not God—for God is love." *Can* this encourage us to sin? *Can* we grieve his Holy Spirit? *Can* we hear him saying, *in vain*, "O do not that abominable thing which I hate"? "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance: but, after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?"

OCTOBER 21.—EVENING.

"Whose I am, and whom I serve." ACTS xxvii. 23.

THIS was the language of Paul, when he informed his fellow-sufferers of the angelical vision with which he had been favoured in the night.

He calls God his owner when he says, *Whose I am*; but he avows nothing that is peculiar to himself. We also are his. He has numberless claims to us; and these claims we should feel and acknowledge. They are founded in creation: in providence: in redemption: in self-dedication. The Corinthian converts "gave themselves unto the Lord." And there has been a time in the experience of every Christian, when he has made the same surrender. And the more he reflects upon it the more he approves of his

conduct, and glories in the thought that he is not his own, but the Lord's.

Yet when he adds, *and whom I serve*; some may be ready to say, "Ah! Paul did serve him. He was called to be an Apostle, to preach the Gospel, to write Scripture, to plant churches, to work miracles. Never did one man perhaps do so much in glorifying God and serving his generation as he—But what can I do? Can I serve him?" Here let it be observed, that the service of God is not confined to great offices and talents. These do not depend upon us, but are dispensed by the Lord of all as he pleases; and he looks to the heart, and where this is towards him, desires are actions. Where there is first a willing mind, it is accepted, according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. He sees benevolence where nothing is given; and martyrdom where nothing is suffered. "Let her alone; she hath done what she could"—

"No blank, no trifle, Nature made or meant.

—If nothing more than purpose in thy power,

Thy purpose firm, is equal to the deed.

Who does the best his circumstance allows,

Does well, acts nobly—angels could no more."

The service of God is very extensive, and is not to be confined to what many only mean by it. It reaches further than express acts of devotion. The means of grace are indeed both duties and privileges; and they who do not value them are either in an unconverted or a backsliding state. In a proper frame of mind, good men will sanctify the Sabbath, repair to the sanctuary, and retire to read the Scripture, and pray, and meditate. But they will regard these things only as *means* of grace, in the use of which they

renew their strength, and gain fresh supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ to enable them to fill up Christianly the whole of their stations in life. They therefore serve God in the week as well as on the Sabbath, and in their own dwellings as well as in the temple. They acknowledge him in all their ways; and whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they do all to the glory of God. A constant regard to his word as their rule, and his honour as their end, elevates common actions into moral, and moral into spiritual; and thus the magistrate while upon the bench, and the traveller while upon the road, and the tradesman while in the shop, and the labourer while in the field, and the mother while training up her infant charge, are all doing the work of the Lord, and have the testimony that they please him.

Servants, besides their known, usual, regular course of action, are liable to particular and occasional calls of service which cannot be previously prescribed. Thus we are to observe the movements of Providence, and fall in with those duties which grow out of events. In this spirit David said, "On thee do I wait all the day;" holding himself always in a readiness to receive orders, and in effect asking, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

"They also serve that wait." There is a suffering as well as a doing service. God is never more pleased than when we deny ourselves, and shew that we love him above all, and are willing to leave all, and lose all, for his sake. As the exercise of the passive graces is the most difficult, so perhaps it is the most impressive. We peculiarly glorify God in the fires. We are witnesses for him; and testify to the excellency of the principles, and to the power of the re-

souls of the religion we profess. We shew that his grace can support us when every other dependence fails, and his comforts cheer us when all other springs of refreshment are dried up. When, by accident or sickness, we are led in from active scenes, we fear we are going to possess months of vanity, while perhaps we are entering some of the most useful parts of our life. If we endure as Christians, the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon us; and by our patience, submission, peace, and joy, some around us are instructed, some convinced, some encouraged—while perhaps superior beings are excited to glorify God in us—for we are a spectacle to angels as well as unto men.

But what is the nature of the service in which we shall be engaged in the heavenly world? when we shall have dropped all our infirmities? and our powers will be equal to our work and our wishes?—"Therefore are they before his throne, and *serve* him day and night in his temple." "His servants shall *serve* him, and they shall see his face."

OCTOBER 22.—MORNING.

"There stood by me this night the angel of God."

ACTS xxvii. 23.

How Paul was now engaged we know not. Perhaps he was praying. This is the resource of the Christian in every storm; and to this the promise is made, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee." Nor can we determine where he was. Considering that he was a prisoner, and so many on

board, it is not likely that he had a cabin to himself. Yet he seems to have been alone: at least the privilege was personal and individual. There were near three hundred in the ship, but none of them was aware of what was passing with Paul. The Lord, in the same assembly, and in the same pew, can hold communion with one, and not with another. "Lord, how is it," said one of the disciples, "that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world?" The question implies wonder; but our Saviour had promised the distinction. Luke was in the ship, but Paul only has the vision. All the partakers of Divine grace are not allowed the same indulgences. All the Apostles were not to witness the raising of the ruler's daughter, and our Lord's transfiguration and passion; but only Peter, James, and John; and though he loved them all, John is called the disciple whom Jesus loved. It was not Luke, but Paul, that was to appear before Nero—Paul was the sufferer. Divine comforts correspond with our trials. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so the consolation aboundeth by Christ."

Two things are observable. First, the messenger: the *angel of the Lord*. We know little of angels. The name is expressive of their office, rather than of their nature. They seem to have been the first beings created: they are proverbial for wisdom; and excel in strength: yet they do his commandments, and hearken unto the voice of his word. He saith to one, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; and to each of them, Do this, and, whatsoever it be, he doeth it: for it is his will alone they regard; and they are always satisfied and delighted with it. They are ele

vated above us in rank and estate ; yet they are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them that shall be the heirs of salvation. Such honour and happiness have all the household of faith : the highest of God's creatures are their servants ; they rejoice over them in their repentance, encamp round about them in trouble and danger, convey their souls at death into Abraham's bosom, and in the morning of the resurrection will gather together their bodies from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. They will be our associates for ever—We are come to an innumerable company of angels.

Secondly, the season: *this night*. It was dark, pitch dark: not one star appeared. How was the angel to find Paul far off upon the sea in such a dense obscurity? We are not to judge of their senses by ours. They see not as man seeth. The darkness hideth not from them, but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to them. It was a period of extremity. The Lord could have given Paul the assurance before he had been so long tossed with the tempest; but it was withholden till all hope that they should be saved was taken away. This is what his people have often experienced. His reasons for delay are founded in wisdom and in kindness. He would destroy creature-confidence, and yet teach us never to despair with regard to himself. His conduct shews us that nothing is too hard for the Lord: at eventide it shall be light. It also displays his glory more to cure when the disease has been pronounced desperate, and all other physicians have withdrawn. Hence he abode two days in the same place, after he heard of the case of

Lazarus, and was glad for the sake of his disciples that he was not present to recover him from his sickness, as it would confirm their faith more to see him raised after he had been dead four days.

OCTOBER 22.—EVENING.

"Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sir, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit, we must be cast upon a certain island." ACTS xxvii. 24—26.

LET us observe the angel's address to Paul; and Paul's address to his companions.

The angel's address contains two things. First, an admonition. "Fear not, Paul." There is nothing by which Christians honour their religion more than by confidence in danger, and cheerfulness in trouble. It would therefore have been lamentable had Paul on this occasion failed in spirit; and exposed himself to the reproach Eliphaz unjustly applied to Job: "Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees." Yet it would seem that the frame of his mind began to be weak and wavering. He had nature in him as well as grace. He had eaten nothing for a length of time, and was exhausted with fatigue. He knew what it was to be enervated. In one of his Epistles he speaks of being "in weakness, and fear, and much trembling." In such a case the body depresses the mind; and a man has hardly the command of his own principles. Was Paul

afraid whether he had done right in appealing unto Cæsar? Did he begin to shudder at the thought of appearing before such a monster as Nero? Or was he afraid of sinking? The Lord knew his frame; and remembered that he was dust.

Secondly, an assurance. "Thou must be brought before Cæsar." This was the appointment of God; and it was to answer very important purposes. There his bonds were to be made manifest in the palace, and in all other places. There he was to testify the gospel of the grace of God, and to induce others to speak the word without fear. There he was to make converts to Christianity, and converts even in Cæsar's household. Such was the design of God, and as this purpose *must* be accomplished, Paul's preservation was secure. Even a providential destination has rendered the fulfiller of it invulnerable, and insured his success, as far as he moved in the line of God's appointment. We see this in the case of Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. All our times are in his hands, and we are immortal till our work is done. The assurance includes not only himself, but the whole company: "And, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." The angel could have rescued Paul, and left the crew to perish; but to save them all for his sake was attaching importance to Paul, and putting honour upon him. And in this way the Lord magnifies his people now. The world knoweth them not, yet it is owing to them that their very existence is continued. They are the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. Nations are blessed for their sakes: and though now they are overlooked because they are not heroes and statesmen, in the annals of heaven they are called the repairers

of the breach, the restorers of paths to dwell in. "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God."

Observe also Paul's address to his companions in tribulation. It was tender: "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer." Paul had a feeling heart: and the state of his fellow-sufferers; their pale faces; their haggard looks; their shrieks when the vessel rolled or plunged: the thought of so many perishing, and perishing for ever—for there were in all two hundred threescore and sixteen: all this deeply affected him. He therefore now rejoices on their behalf, and eagerly hastens to alleviate their terror and anguish; and hopes too that the long-suffering of God would prove their eternal salvation.—It was confident: "For I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." Thus he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform. Owing to this, he felt as safe and composed as if already on shore. We have every reason to believe what God has spoken; and not only is his honour, but our own profit concerned in our believing it—It is the only way to solid comfort in such a world as this. Surely if ye will not believe ye shall not be established. But thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon thee, because he trusteth in thee.—It was predictive: "Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island"—not

a continent, but an *island*, and “a *certain* island”—and we must be *cast* upon it, that is, wrecked there; the vessel will be destroyed, though the passengers will be preserved. Why does he mention and particularize all this? To be a sign; that when the fact should have taken place, all might be persuaded that Paul spoke from divine authority. This is the design of all prophecy: it is not to amuse and perplex us in the previous study, but to confirm our faith by the event; as our Saviour more than once remarked, “These things I have said unto you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye may believe.”

The prediction was soon followed by the accomplishment: “And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land. And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.”—And how was Paul viewed then? When he first came on deck they probably considered him an enthusiast, if not an impostor; and if they did not revile him they pitied his weakness, that he should expose himself to so many hardships and dangers for the sake of one Jesus who had been crucified, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. But the storm convinced them that Paul had good reason for his attachment and confidence. While they were filled with confusion and horror, he knew whom he believed, and was not ashamed of his hope. They called every man upon his god, but none of them could hear or save their suppliants. But Paul’s master could save to the uttermost; and he not only delivered his servant, but the entire crew for his sake—So he can bring our adversaries to our feet, and

make them know that he has loved us—So that men shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth—For their rock is not as our Rock, our enemies themselves being judges.

OCTOBER 23.—MORNING.

"I am come that they might have life." JOHN I. 10.

THOUGH men have differed in their definitions of life, they have all agreed in their estimation of it. Even the father of lies spake truth when he said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. Yet what is this life which we so highly prize? nourish with so much care? and to preserve which are ready to make every kind of sacrifice? What is it in duration? "A vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." What is it in dignity? "We spend our years as a tale that is told." What is it in enjoyment? Hear Jacob—"Few, and full of evil, have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage." "But his was, perhaps, a peculiar case." What says Job? "*Man* that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." "But he expressed himself under depression and gloom." What then says Solomon, who withheld his heart from no joy? "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." But here is a life that deserves the name: a life, spiritual in its nature; endless in its continuance: consisting, not of an immortality of being only, but of blessedness; commencing in grace; completed in glory; and emphatically called The Life of

God. Of this life the Lord Jesus here speaks—"I am come that they might have life."

He came to *procure it for us*. The blessing comes every way free to us; but it cost him dear. If we live he must die. "The bread," said he, "which I give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Princes have often sacrificed the lives of their subjects to their own: yea, and where their own have not been in danger, they have offered thousands of victims on the altar of their vanity or revenge. But the Prince of peace gave his life a ransom for many. He was poor. He was a man of sorrows. You see him agonizing in the garden; and hear him exclaiming on the cross, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" Why is all this? Is he guilty? "In him was no sin." Yet he was esteemed stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But "he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." "One died for all."

He came to *announce it to us*. We can derive no benefit from him without a dependence upon him; an application to him; a connexion with him. But all this requires the knowledge of him: and therefore says God, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." It is true we are justified by faith—but "how can we believe in him of whom we have not heard? and how can we hear without a preacher?" He therefore "came and preached peace." "I am come," said he, "a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." He proclaimed the

nature of this life; the source of it; the medium of it; the certainty of it; the present enjoyment of it. His disciples, therefore, well said, To whom should we go, but unto thee? thou hast the words of eternal life. And these words he dispensed, not only by his personal ministry, but by the instrumentality of others. What the Apostles did, *he* did; because he sent them, and qualified them: he inspired them, and commanded them to preach the Gospel to every creature, and also to record it, for the use of future all ages; so that we can read what they delivered.

He came to *produce it in us*. "The Son quickeneth whom he will." He received, in consequence of his death, the whole dispensation of the Holy Ghost; and hence it is called "The Spirit of Christ." And this Spirit is, as the Apostle calls it, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which makes us free from the law of sin and death. Nothing less than this can insure the result. It is above the efficiency of education; of example; of moral suasion; and of all the means of grace—without the grace of the means. The Gospel cannot accomplish it, if it comes in word only—It is the Spirit that giveth life. The servant of the Lord is like Gehazi. He went and laid the staff upon the child, but no life appeared till his master himself came. Who then is Paul? and who is Apollos? but ministers *by* whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? And they who were once dead in trespasses and sins, but are now walking in newness of life, will acknowledge that *he* quickened them; and will readily give him the glory that is due to his holy Name.

In this blessed business, therefore, he is all in all. He came that we might have life—Came to procure

it for us as our Priest—To announce it as our Prophet—To produce it as our King. To obtain it by his blood. To publish it by his Gospel. To bestow it by his Spirit. He is therefore called, this life itself in the abstract—When he who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory.

But how many neglect him, and compel him to complain, Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life! Hence the heinousness of their guilt, and the dreadfulness of their condemnation. Whatever difficulties attend this truth, in connexion with any other, they attach only to the explanation, not to the fact itself. Nothing can be clearer, from the Scripture, than that they who thus perish will destroy themselves; and be treated as spiritual suicides.

But if we desire this life, can we suppose the Saviour will refuse us, when we go to him for the very purpose for which he came? Did he ever refuse any? Can he refuse any? He cannot—He has bound himself—“HIM THAT COMETH UNTO ME, I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT.”

OCTOBER 23.—EVENING.

“And that they might have it more abundantly.”

JOHN x. 10.

THUS he not only informs us of the design of his advent: “I am come that they might have life;” but, like himself, adds the extensiveness of it—“and that they might have it more abundantly.” This may be exemplified in three comparisons.

We have life more abundantly than *Adam*. His

life, before the Fall, was a noble life; but it is surpassed by the life of the Christian.—This is firmer as to its tenure. The life of innocence was precarious. It was suspended on the fallible will of man. The stock was in Adam's own hands; and he failed, and ruined all his posterity. But this life can never be destroyed. The Head of the New Covenant ever liveth; and because he lives, his people shall live also: I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.—It is richer as to its quality. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. It is not the primeval body of Adam which is to be the model in our resurrection, but the glorious body of the Saviour. We are to bear the image of the heavenly. Had Adam remained innocent, though he would never have died, yet must he have experienced a change before he could have been capable of enjoying the blessedness which the poorest Christian expects; for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. After a proper trial of his obedience, he would have been removed to a higher state; but even then he must have been a stranger to many interesting feelings and delightful enjoyments, arising from all the operations of divine grace in our recovery from the depths of the Fall to the glories of heaven. Eden was not equal to the Paradise above. The creation of man is excelled by his redemption. The righteousness of a perfect creature is far below the righteousness of God, in which we are not only justified, but "exalted."

We have life more abundantly than the *Jewish*

Church. They derived their life from the same source with us; and it was essentially the same with ours. But we have it more plenteously as to knowledge, liberty, and enjoyment. We are fully justified in considering our spiritual advantages as very superior to their privileges, by our Saviour himself, who said to his disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." They had the types and shadows; we have the very image of the thing. They saw the Messiah afar off, and under a veil; he is with us, and we behold him with open face. They had the first fruits; we have the whole vintage. They had the dawn; we have the full day—God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. They, from their comparative darkness, were inspired with more disquiet and terror; they received the spirit of bondage to fear: we receive the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The way into the holiest was not then made manifest: the people never entered where God dwelt between the Cherubim: the high priest only went in; and he only once a year. But we have all boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; and may draw near in full assurance of faith. They came to a material mountain, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness and darkness, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more. "But we are come unto

Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

We have life more abundantly than we had it *ourselves before*. Vital religion, though imperfect, is growing and progressive. Under the influences of the Holy Spirit, we go from strength to strength in our course; and are renewed day by day in our experience. There is life in an acorn; but the oak has it more abundantly. There is wheat in the blade; but how much more in the full corn in the ear! What a difference between Sir Isaac Newton when a babe on his mother's knee, and a philosopher measuring the distance of the planets! "Why a man can but live." Indeed! Do you not sometimes say I am all languor; I have no life in me? At other times you are all vigour and alacrity—How you live then! What a difference between a man confined in an hospital and a man at large, able to fill and enjoy his station! A man may be alive, and be blind, and deaf and lame, and able to eat nothing with a relish. Some real Christians are little better than this: they are—just alive! But they are to be suspected who are only anxious to know that they have the reality of divine grace, while they are regardless of increase in the divine life. More is desirable. More is attainable. He came not only that we might have life—but have it more *abundantly*.

Wherefore pray, "that he would grant you, ac-

according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man: that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

OCTOBER 24.—MORNING.

"And I will give him the morning star." REV. ii. 28.

IF we found any difficulty in determining the subject of this promise, we could refer to the Speaker's own declaration, in another part of this Book—"I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and the morning star." Here we see the advantage of comparing one passage of Scripture with another. What is general in one is particularized in another; and what is darker in one, is clearer in another.

Does he then promise *himself*—I will give him the morning star? Yes—He is the guide and the way: the teacher and the lesson: the priest and the sacrifice: the giver and the gift. He is all in all. By promising *himself*, he would teach us to look for happiness in himself, and not in the creature. He also knew that nothing else could satisfy the minds of his people, who would be sure to say,

"Give what thou canst—without thee we are poor:
And, with thee, rich, take what thou wilt away."

And thus also he would encourage their expectations: for what will he withhold, if he gives himself? Therefore, because he could promise no greater, he promised himself. The bestowment of himself would have been greater than the bestowment of heaven: for heaven is, so to speak, but a part of him. He that buildeth the house hath more honour than the house.

But has he not already given himself to his people? And yet he speaks as if the donation was future—I *will* give him the morning star. Yes; as soon as they believed on him they received him, and had the privilege of becoming the sons of God. But as to their knowledge, experience, and enjoyment, he communicates himself to them by degrees. The Apostle therefore says, after many years of communion with him, That I *may* win Christ, and be found in him; that I *may* know him. The promise *must* be principally accomplished hereafter. We *could* not receive him in all his fulness now. Our place, our condition, our powers forbid. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

But let me survey the image—I will give him the *morning star*. The morning star, to our view, is the most beautiful and luminous. It is distinguished by its sparkling brightness. Many resemble Christ; but in all things he has the pre-eminence. Prophets, priests, and kings, have been anointed, as well as he; but he was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. O how great is his beauty! He is fairer than the children of men; fairer than the children of God; fairer than the sons of God who shouted for joy at the Creation—Yea, he is altogether lovely.

But the thing is, that this luminary is the har-binger of day. Therefore it is called the day star; and the morning star. The truth of the image, therefore, is to assure us—that to those that believe on him, there is a glorious season drawing on. The night of ignorance, and error, and sin, and sorrow, with them is rapidly terminating—Weeping may endure for the night; but joy cometh in the morning. Look—look, Christians! *There* is the shining pledge. It never failed yet. It cannot deceive. Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed. The NIGHT is far spent. The day is at hand. And then your sun shall no more go down.

Let this promise place me, and keep me in a proper frame of mind. Let it raise me above the world. Let it teach me, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. Let it induce me to rejoice evermore; yea, and in every thing to give thanks. To the upright there ariseth *light* in the darkness. If in the world I have tribulation, in him I have peace. Many things are denied me; but I can dispense with them, since he is mine. Why should I envy others? They succeed; they gain; they possess—But *I* have the morning star.

“What others value, I resign;
 Lord, 'tis enough that *thou* art mine:
 I shall behold thy blissful face;
 And stand complete in righteousness!”

OCTOBER 24.—EVENING.

“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief”

MARK IX. 24.

How many subjects are there, concerning which a Christian is frequently compelled to express him-

self in these words—"Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!"

This is the case sometimes even with regard to the being of a God. It may seem almost impossible that we should feel any doubt with regard to a truth so obvious and undeniable as the Divine existence. Many would probably deem a discourse against atheism altogether unworthy of their attention. They would observe, that Moses, in the book of Genesis, does not attempt to prove a Deity, but takes it for granted; and that only a fool would say in his heart, there is none. Yet who has never, in any instance or degree, been affected by this folly? And who, while he acknowledges that no truth can be so unanswerably proved, does not feel that no fact is so confounding? Who has not been dazzled into a momentary blindness by the very splendour of the light? We own that there are difficulties in Christianity; but what right has a Deist to be scandalized with these mysteries? As Christians, we admit nothing so mysterious as what he admits along with us—

"A God allow'd, all other wonders cease."

And who can reflect on a Being who is self-existent, who never had a beginning, with whom nothing is past and nothing is future, who is no wiser now than at the creation, who knows all things actual and all things possible, who is everywhere at the same time, governing all worlds, and organizing the minutest insects—and never be urged to exclaim "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief"?

This is the case sometimes with regard to the truth of revelation. Here again some may be ready

to wonder. "The truth of revelation! Can a good man ever question this? Is it not the charter of his privileges? the very basis of all his hopes? And if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" This they feel; and therefore every apprehension, however partial, however far from settling into a conviction, so alarms them. Bunyan says, that all through life a thought would occasionally rush into his mind, "Perhaps the Scripture is a falsehood;" and nothing, he says, can describe the shock the momentary impression gave to his feelings. Many now living have felt the same. The most powerful objections to the Gospel are not always those that are circulated in coffee-houses, and handed about in sceptical pamphlets. Many insult rather than argue; and condemn, while they oppose. They do not enter far enough, nor grapple earnestly enough, to feel those difficulties which serious minds meet with who must study the subject, and are all alive to the importance of it. There is not one of these but has often exclaimed, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

This is the case too with regard to Providence. Here the doctrine is admitted, and resisted: received in theory, and denied in practice. I believe that, in the management of my concerns, God does all things, and that he does all things well. I can easily reason myself into this satisfactory conclusion: for it is only to allow that he is wise, and righteous, and good; and therefore that he must always do right. Yet I seem to be often arraigning him, or wishing to direct him. Hence I am so unwilling to submit. Hence I am so prone to repine and murmur. Hence I am so full of anxiousness and foreboding. Hence

I am so little able to cast all my care upon him, knowing that he careth for me—"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

This is the case, too, with regard to the promises. Here again, "what unbelieving believers we are!" I see these promises in the Scriptures, like the stars in the heavens. They are exceeding great and precious. They suit all my wants, and are fully sufficient to relieve them. I love them exceedingly. I long to claim and appropriate them as my heritage for ever, and to feel them the rejoicing of my heart. Yet, when I read, though the God of truth says it—and he cannot deny himself—"Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out;—I will be with thee in trouble—Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days so shall thy strength be"—I am often as if he had said nothing! "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

And well may the Christian thus pray when he considers the evil of unbelief, and knows how dishonourable it is to God, and how injurious it is to himself. "If ye will not believe," says the Prophet, "surely ye shall not be established." The word preached cannot profit unless it be mixed with faith. In prayer we must ask believing, or we shall not receive. We read of the obedience, and of the joy of faith. We walk, we live, by faith. And no wonder the Christian feels the remains of his unbelief; and weeps over them—And he *will*, with this father of the child, "cry out, and say with *tears*, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

But this is a token for good. And while you bewail the weakness of your faith, and you ought to deplore it, we must encourage and comfort you con-

cerning it. What we are going to advance may be abused, but it will be first usurped by those to whom it does not belong; and it is not easy always to hinder stealing. We say then, First, that these lamented remains of unbelief shall not be suffered to condemn you. Secondly, there is nothing in them peculiar to your experience: all your brethren are familiar with the same complaints. Thirdly, the power of the evil is already broken, and it shall never have dominion over you again. Fourthly, the very existence of it will soon cease for ever. Lastly, it is possible even now to subdue much more of the very being of it: so that it may much less oppose and distress you—He that hath begun the good work in you giveth more grace, and is the God of all grace. He can cause your faith to grow exceedingly; and fill you with joy and peace in believing.

OCTOBER 25.—MORNING.

"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." JOHN X. 9.

A DOOR is a very familiar and striking representation of the Lord Jesus. It seems hardly necessary to remark, that it must be a metaphor. Yet the Papists, from taking literally what is spoken in a similar instance, have introduced the monstrous doctrine of transubstantiation. Because, when he took the bread, and the wine, our Saviour said, "This is my body, and this is my blood," they believe that the disciples received his real body and blood, and that every communicant does the same now, when the priest has consecrated the elements: and, say they, we only take him at his word—nothing can be plainer.

Upon the same principle, we may say, he is timber and nails: for he says—what can be clearer?—I am the door. But can any man of common sense—can a child suppose that he means any thing more than that a door is an image of him?

The design of the allusion is obvious. A door is the medium of passage—and Jesus stands between God and us. He is the mediator of the new covenant. God comes to us through him; and conveys all his blessings to us by him. And we approach God through him. I am the way, said he—No man cometh unto the Father, but by me. And as, with regard to our persons, we come unto God by him, so it is with regard to our services: we offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. And with regard to both, we have boldness and access, with confidence, only by the faith of him.

But how is the person described who derives benefit from him? He makes use of him for this purpose—“*By me if any man enter in.*” This supposes a spiritual concern. Many are careless about their souls. They have never been convinced of sin: never induced, from an apprehension of their danger, to cry, What must I do to be saved? They are men of the world; and all their anxieties are confined within the narrow bound of time and sense. Others, if in a degree awakened, are not enlightened. Their concern is erroneously directed: for there is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but it ends in death. There is a refuge that cannot abide the storm. There is a hope that is like the spider's web; as curiously wrought, and as easily destroyed. The case is this. There is salvation in none other than in him, who was delivered for our offences, and

was raised again for our justification. In the Lord alone have we righteousness and strength. To him, therefore, must men come. And to him the Christian *does* come. He knows, not only that there is no salvation for him out of Christ, but that there is no salvation for him in Christ, without a dependence upon him, and an application to him. He knows that, as a medicine, never taken, can never cure; and as food, never eaten, can never nourish: so, an unapplied Saviour is no Saviour to him. He therefore makes use of Christ for every end he is revealed to answer. He builds upon him, as a foundation. As a way, he walks in him. As a door, by him he enters in.

And what are the advantages he obtains when admitted? *Safety*—"He shall be saved." Saved from the curse of the law, and the wrath to come—Saved from the roaring lion, who goeth about seeking whom he may devour—Saved from the king of terrors—Saved from a world lying in wickedness—Saved from an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God—Saved in the Lord, with an everlasting salvation. *Liberty*—"He shall go in and out." A man is free in his own house. He goes in and out at his pleasure—and when he goes out, he is not shut out like a stranger; and when he goes in, he is not shut in like a criminal. This too is the privilege of sheep, under the care of a good shepherd. They go in; but if they could not go out, the fold would be a prison. They therefore, at night, go in for protection: and in the morning go out for food. The expression, therefore, is used in the Scripture as significant of freedom; and the meaning is, that what is done for the Christian's safety does not compromise

his liberty. He knows the truth; and the truth makes him free: and he is free indeed—free, to go wherever he pleases in Immanuel's land—free, to partake of all the privileges of the sons of God. *Plenty*—"And find pasture." Ah! said one of them realizing this, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters." So Isaiah—"They shall feed in the ways"—the ways of his commandments, ordinances, and dispensations—"and their pastures shall be in all high places"—where they cannot be hid; but where they may seem unlikely to find supplies; as elevations, especially in warm countries, are commonly barren—but he feeds them, while he lifts them up, for ever. Religion raises them; but not into regions of barren speculation—for it is added, "They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them, for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them."

OCTOBER 25.—EVENING.

"Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood: in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old." MICAH vii. 14.

HERE is obviously an improper punctuation. It affects the meaning, and injures the force of the passage; in consequence of which the reader may be led to suppose that Carmel was the place in which the captives were now disadvantageously dwelling whereas it was the place in which it was desirable for them to feed. The colon pause therefore should be ~~not after the word "wood."~~ and then the reading

will be according to the Hebrew structure, "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood: in the midst of Carmel let them feed, in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old." For "Carmel" was not a barren, dreary, wilderness country; but consisting of fine open pasture land. It is never mentioned without commendation; and is therefore here named with Bashan and Gilead. Indeed, in the Scripture it is often used, as well as "Sharon," proverbially, for any scene of richness and fertility.

The prophet refers immediately to the Jews, who were exiled in Babylon, and implores their restoration to their own country, where God would deal with them according to the most favoured and flourishing periods of their history. But when we consider the symbolical language of the sacred writers, and the typical nature of the Jewish dispensations, we are authorized to pass from the natural to the spiritual Israel.

We may observe therefore the persons to be favoured. They are called "his people." He has always had a people for his Name; and to know who they are we need not ascend up into heaven, to examine the Divine purposes: we have the book of life in our hands, where they are recorded, though not by name, yet by character; and he may run that readeth. They are described as "the flock of his heritage." While this expresses them to be sheep, it holds them forth collectively as all one in Christ Jesus; and shews the interest Jehovah has in them. A man may have a flock in his temporary possession, and under his superintendence; but, though it be the flock of his care, it is not the flock of his heritage.

In the East a person's whole substance often consisted in his flocks and herds: of course, he would feel a peculiar concern in them as his own. And the Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him. His portion is his people. And he derives the revenue of his glory from them. They are also said to "dwell solitarily in the wood." There are few around them with whom they can feel congeniality; for we may be alone, though surrounded with company. Yet here is not only solitariness, but unlikeness of supplies, and exposure to danger. Are not the afflictions of the righteous many? Are they not sometimes perplexed and comfortless? Are they not often timid and alarmed, like sheep and lambs in a wood, when they hear beasts of prey howling about them?

See therefore the blessing implored on their behalf: "Feed thy people with thy rod." The "rod" is the symbol and the instrument of the shepherd; and the word "feed," by a common figure of speech that puts a part for the whole, is significant of the discharge of all his office. The meaning therefore is, that the Lord would lead them by his word and Spirit in the way that they should go. That he would heal them when wounded or diseased. That he would restore them when they run astray. That he would guard them from all their perils. And especially that he would provide them repast and repose. We mention these together because his sheep not only hunger and thirst, but are frequently weary-worn and faint. Hence the inquiry for *both*: "Tell me where thou *feedest*, where thou makest thy flock to *rest at noon*." And when the believer realizes

the blessings of his salvation, and appropriates the promises, and enjoys the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and feels the refreshments of Divine ordinances, and can leave all his cares with the providence of his heavenly Father, he knows what David means when he says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters."

But how was the privilege to be dispensed? "In the *midst* of *Carmel* let them feed, in *Bashan*, and *Gilead*, as in the *days of old*." Thus nothing less is implored than the richest measure and degree of provisions and indulgences. But are supplicants to be choosers and prescribers? And shall they, who are not worthy of the least of all his mercies, not only ask for relief, but the noblest entertainments? Yes; such is the condescension and kindness of Him who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. He has said, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Our Saviour reproves his disciples for the contract-edness of their asking: "hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Let us pray therefore, as Paul did, not according to our meanness and unworthiness, but "according to the riches of his glory"—When Alexander bestowed a valuable boon, the favoured partaker said, "It is too much for me to receive." But the conqueror of the world replied, "It is not too much for me to give."

The prayer we have reviewed was very great—But was it answered? Read the next verse. "According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew unto him marvellous things." So

sure is it that he is God, hearing prayer. So often does he fulfil the promise, "While they call I will answer, and before they speak I will hear."

OCTOBER 26.—MORNING.

"O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved."

JER. iv. 14.

THOUGH these words are addressed to Jerusalem, by a principle of the fairest reasoning they extend to every individual who needs the same purification and deliverance. And who does not? Yea, the circumstance strengthens the argument. Jerusalem was called the Holy City; the City of the living God. There stood his temple. There were his servants to make known his will. There they had Moses and the prophets. If *they* needed such an address, is it needless for us? With all their unbelief and ingratitude, disobedience and perverseness, they were fair specimens of the human race. In Adam, all died; and from him we derive a mortal, and therefore a depraved nature—"What is *man*, that *he* should be clean; or he that is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?" All, therefore, need pardoning mercy, and sanctifying grace—All need to be saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. But there are two difficulties.

First. God himself is represented as concerned for the success of the measure. "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved." This interjection, with us, often implies weakness and grief, as well as desire. We must therefore take care how we apply these expressions to God, lest we degrade the perfections of his nature.

He speaks to us after the manner of men; but his condescension must not rob him of his glory. Yet his language is not devoid of truth. However metaphorical it may be, there is in it a reality that more than justifies it. To which we may add, that even grief and weakness had better be ascribed to God, than insincerity. Let us be assured of this, that he means what he says. While he hates our sins, he loves our souls; and is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He is not only the righteous Governor, but the kind Father. This is the lovely character under which he delights to display himself. Hence his expostulation with himself—"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." Hence the oath he has taken—"As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; wherefore turn, and live ye." Hence the sacrifice of the Cross—"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Hence all the means he is incessantly employing to awaken and engage our attention to the things that belong to our peace. Hence he has established the ministry of reconciliation, and sends forth his servants to beseech us, in his name, to be reconciled unto God.

Secondly. The work is considered as of our own achieving; and *we* are called upon to cleanse our hearts from wickedness. It would be a contradiction of the whole Bible were we to be regarded as the authors. But we are the instruments. God not only

worketh in us, but by us. And hence, though all is of grace, yet *we*—"will and do." We believe and repent, and hold on our way, and wax stronger and stronger. It would be an abuse of the language to infer from it, that we have power to do this naturally, or of ourselves—yet the address would be absurd had we not the ability in some other way. God has the right to command, though we have lost the power to obey; but this is not the ground of the injunction. If in him our help was not found, he would not thus speak to us. But it is. His grace is sufficient for us. Every thing necessary for our deliverance from sin is provided, and presented in the Gospel; and we must have recourse to it in the use of the means which he has ordained. The address, therefore, is not like a command to a man to flee—a thing unnatural; and which he cannot enable himself to do: but like a command to a man, who was ready to perish for want, to take and eat. Though he has nothing of his own, he has in view and at hand every kind of supply, and he is welcome to partake of it. Or, like a command to a sick man to be cured: he cannot indeed heal himself, but he has one near him who is able and willing to heal him; and asks, Wilt thou be made whole? And to this remedy he is to submit. All such commands are designed to make us sensible of our wants and weakness; and to bring us upon our knees. Then every thing is possible. Forgiveness and sanctification are attainable—are certain. And having this hope in us, we purify ourselves even as he is pure. Having these promises, we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

OCTOBER 26.—EVENING.

"O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved."

JER. iv. 14.

THE words remind us, that sin is of a defiling nature. It is therefore held forth by every kind of uncleanness; by wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores; by leprosy and the plague; by mire and dirt; by the rottenness and corruption of the grave. It defiles every thing it touches. In consequence of it the whole creation groaneth; and all our eyes behold is doomed to perish like the house of the leper, under the law, because of the infection of the inhabitant. "O do not," says God, "the abominable thing that I hate." "My soul loathed them." How great must that evil be, which can induce the Creator to loathe the work of his own hands! The Father of all, to loathe his very offspring! And even the God of love, the very essence of mercy, to say to them at last, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" O my soul! does sin appear to thee as it does to him—exceeding sinful?

Secondly. That the purification we need extends to the heart—"Wash thine heart from wickedness." The reason is, because this is the very seat of the pollution. Some, who know their lives are open to censure, will yet plead for the goodness of their hearts. But a good heart will always produce a good life, as naturally as a good tree yieldeth good fruit. Others contend that our corruption is not innate, but acquired; derived, not from within, but from without—Yet, says the faithful and true Witness, "From *within*, out of the *heart* of men, proceed evil thoughts,

adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man." Hence,

"No outward forms can make us clean—
The leprosy lies deep within."

And we must be pure in heart. How is this to be ascertained? By our deliverance from the love of sin. The love of sin defiles even more than the practice. But every man that is renewed in the spirit of his mind not only avoids sin, but hates it. He feels it to be his burden and his grief. And while any of the abomination continues adherent to him, he exclaims, O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Thirdly. This purification is connected with salvation—"Wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved."—It is *necessary* to salvation. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Indeed, in such a state, and with such a disposition, the enjoyment of heaven is as impossible as the attainment. The exclusion, therefore, is not arbitrary, but unavoidable.—It will *certainly terminate* in salvation. This is not only fully implied in the declaration, but it is made the matter of express promise—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."—It is a *part of salvation*. The man who has experienced it is not only an heir, but a subject of the blessedness. He has not, indeed, the perfection of the being, but

he has more than the title and the pledge—he has the beginning. Being made free from sin, and become the servant of God, he has his fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life.

OCTOBER 27.—MORNING.

“When he had by himself purged our sins.” HEB. I. 3.

THERE is a cleansing from sin by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost; and we read of the Saviour’s cleansing his Church with the washing of water by the word. But here the purification has another import. It was well understood by the Hebrews from their own services—It is to clear from guilt by atonement, or to remove iniquity by expiation, so that it will not be imputed or punished. Without shedding of blood there is no remission; and in him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. This is the meaning. And therefore it is spoken of as a thing done already, and accomplished when he died upon the cross. For it is said, he accomplished this purging of our sins—

“By himself.” This has a twofold reference. It distinguishes him from the high priest under the law. *He* put away sin typically; but it was not by the sacrifice of *himself*, but of the victims whose blood he shed and carried into the holy place. But Christ washed us from our sins in *his own* blood: and through the eternal Spirit he offered *himself*, without spot, to God; and thus purges the conscience

from dead works. It also shews us that he was alone in the work, without a partner, without a helper, without a comforter. He trod the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with him. This was even signified by his stipulation in the garden: "If ye seek me, let these go their way;" and also by the conduct of his disciples, when "all forsook him and fled."

Here we see the vastness of his love—That he would interpose on the behalf of those who were guilty and deserved to suffer. "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "When we were enemies we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son." And he was under no constraint or mistake. He well knew what his engagement would cost him—yet he was more than willing—yet, dreadful as the scene was, when it drew near, he turned not away his back, he repented not of his undertaking—Yea, he said, I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Surely such love passeth knowledge!

But we see his greatness as well as his goodness—that he could purge our sins by himself. Think of the millions of sinners saved; think of the myriads of sins with which each of them was charged; and the evil there was in every sin—"Yet the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all! And he taketh away the sin of the world! And his blood cleanseth from all sin!" This would seem incredible; but it is called "the blood of God," that is, of One who was

Divine as well as human. No wonder *he* not only finished transgression, and made an end of sin, but brought in everlasting righteousness; not only satisfied the law, but magnified it, and made it honourable.

Hence let us never think of adding any thing to the efficacy of his sacrifice by our doings or sufferings. This was the great point so urged by the Reformers. They differed in many things; but *here* they were perfectly agreed, and resolved rather to die than to yield—that nothing should blend with the death of Christ as the foundation of our hope, and the ground of our plea, for acceptance and justification with God. In one thing they have been mistaken. Much of what they said against good works applied only to Popish good works; that is, to abstinences and performances enjoined only by will-worship and the traditions and commandments of men. They honoured what the Scripture means by good works, works done by the grace of God, and according to the rule of his own word—Yet these, even these, much as they valued them for other necessary uses, they excluded in whole, and in part, from *that* work of which the Saviour said, “It is finished.”

Let us also beware of diminishing its virtue. We really take from its all-sufficiency when we feel and talk as if it was not *by itself* fully adequate to all the purposes of a sinner's relief. O thou of little faith! wherefore dost thou doubt? This sacrifice has satisfied Divine justice. Why should it not satisfy thy conscience? why art thou afraid to rely upon a complete, an infinite propitiation for sin? So far as the East is from the West, so far hath he removed

our transgressions from us. Think of this, and joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. That atonement, when we trust in it and plead it, renders us dearer to God than even a state of innocency could have done—It is an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. Think of this, and let it give you boldness and access with confidence in your approaches to God. Think of this, and let it support you under all your trials. All may be rough under foot, but all is calm and clear over head. Men may frown, but God smiles. He may chastise, but he cannot condemn; and the correction is in love to your souls, and designed for your profit. Here is the tree for the healing of the waters of Marah.

And you, poor convinced sinner, you diminish its value unless you find in it enough to encourage even you, and even in sight of all your desert! We blame you, not for believing that sin is exceeding sinful, or feeling that the load of it is a burden too heavy for you to bear. You ought to ask, "How shall I come before the Lord, and bow before the high God?" And it is well to be convinced that you have no sacrifice of your own to offer. But there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Surely *he* hath borne our grief, and carried our sorrow. We are made nigh by the blood of Christ. Be not faithless, but believing.

"Should worlds conspire to drive me thence,
Moveless and firm this heart should lie;
Resolv'd, for that's my last defence,
If I must perish, there to die."

OCTOBER 27.—EVENING.

“And as they followed, they were afraid.” MARK x. 32.

IN these men we see a representation of Christians—*Following*; but *afraid*. The one shewing their constant character; the other, their frequent experience

They are followers of Christ. They follow him under various allusions. They follow him as sheep follow the shepherd that is leading them to pasture. It is to himself he refers when he says, “When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.” They follow him as beggars follow a benefactor from whom they are seeking and expecting alms and relief. They follow him as travellers follow a guide who shews them the way. They follow him as soldiers follow a commander who leads them to warfare and victory. They follow him as servants follow their master to receive and execute his orders. More frequently they are said to follow him as disciples follow their teacher, whose doctrine they profess, and whose example they imitate. For he is not only their instructor, but their model; to him they are to be conformed. He goes before them in doing and suffering—“If any man,” says he, “will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” And who is he that requires us to be humble and tender? He who was meek and lowly in heart. Who is he that requires us to be condescending? He who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; he who washed the disciples’ feet

Who is he that requires us to be liberal? He who was rich, and for our sakes became poor. Do we suffer? He suffered for us; leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. In this view we are to consider him, lest we be wearied and faint in our minds. When ready to despond or repine, let us look before us, and see him bearing a heavier burden, bearing it for us, and bearing it without a murmur and without a groan.

But while they follow, they may be afraid. Let us arrange the fears of his followers in three classes.

- First, there are those fears which are commendable. For they are enjoined to “pass the time of” their “sojourning here in fear;” and God himself says, “Happy is the man that feareth always.” Such is the fear of caution and vigilance which they are to maintain, as opposed to the carelessness, heedlessness, and rashness of those who expose themselves to temptation, and feast themselves without fear. Such is the fear of diffidence, which keeps us from trusting in our own hearts, and depending upon our own resources and resolutions, either as to duty or trials. Such is that fear of the Lord in which David resolved to worship towards his holy temple, and which he connects with God’s forgiving mercy. It is a fear of offending him, and grieving his Holy Spirit. The first Christians walked in the fear of the Lord; and we may judge what the nature of it was, and learn that there was nothing debasing or distressing in it, for it was united with “the comforts of the Holy Ghost.”
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Secondly, those which are censurable. Such is the fear of man, that bringeth a snare; and which led Nicodemus to come to him by night, and Peter

to deny him thrice. The righteous should be bold as a lion. His cause is good, and his defence is sure—"For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." So that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Such is a slavish fear of God, who ought to be always viewed as our father and our friend. He will not reject us for our infirmities, but spare us as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. We are accepted in the Beloved, however unworthy, and are complete in him, however defective. "We are redeemed," says Zechariah, "that, being delivered, we might serve him *without fear*, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our lives."

Thirdly, those which are neutral—for we know not how to commend or censure them. They are constitutional rather than moral. They arise from the state of the animal spirits; and depend on a disordered bodily frame. Much of the apprehension of death, and many of those feelings which they call temptations of Satan, and doubts, and fears, are often physical effects. They should endeavour to distinguish things that differ, and have a juster view of their state than to be affected in their conclusions by a variation in the weather, or in their animal economy. Yet how much are such persons as these entitled to our sympathy and prayers! We are sometimes much tried in dealing with them; but they refuse to be comforted, because they cannot at present take comfort, and their very religion produces a kind of unbelief—They tremble at the thought of presumption. Yet at the very time these tremblers, like "Fearing" in Bunyan, often fear

nothing but coming short at last. They are willing to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth; and, like Caleb, to follow him fully. And when others decline, and the Saviour says to them, Will ye also go away? the answer rushes up from every feeling of their soul, "Lord, to whom should we go but unto thee? thou hast the words of eternal life."

Am I addressing such an one? Art thou sighing, "If I am a follower at all, I seem only, like Peter, to follow him afar off. At best I come in like one of Gideon's followers, pursuing, yet faint, and ready to halt. Or with the disciples before us, and 'they were amazed,' and 'as they followed they were afraid.' Yet I dare not go back; I cannot turn aside—he is all my salvation and all my desire—no joy can be compared with serving and pleasing him."

Well he knows your frame. Your desire is before him, and your groaning is not hid from him. You may write bitter things against yourselves—but this is what he writes: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it, for thou hast a little strength, and hast not denied my Name." Wait on the Lord, and keep his way,
 • and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land—

"Where doubts and fears shall never come"—
 and all shall "be quietness and assurance for ever."

OCTOBER 29.—MORNING.

"If any man love God, the same is known of him."

1 Cor. viii. 3.

THERE is nothing so mortifying to men as inattention and neglect. Many would rather be hated

than neglected. The one implies, that they are deemed something; the other shews, that they are considered as beneath notice. Hence we are anxious to be known of our fellow-creatures; especially of those who are placed above us—and can take us by the hand—and raise us up—and put us forward in life.

Yet, as men of low degree are vanity, so men of high degree are a lie. After all our servile attentions and compliances, we are never sure of gaining their regard—And if gained, what could even their zeal do for us in our most important interests? Let us turn our anxiety another way. Let us sanctify it. Let us make it the medium of our happiness. Let us be concerned to please God. Then we shall be sure to succeed; and success will be every thing. For in his favour is life—"If any man love God, the same is known of him."

This knowledge being spoken of as the highest privilege, it must intend much more than a mere acquaintance with the subjects of it: for, thus, all are known of him.

The least thing intended is *discernment*. The Lord knows their condition. Knows all their walking through this great wilderness. Knows all their trials. Knows the pressure of every burthen they bear. Knows their frame, and remembers that they are dust. He perceives all their dangers. Their enemies may plot against them; but they do it in the sight of their Father and Friend. And, as to their persons, the Lord knoweth them that are his. He never overlooks them in the crowd. If there was only one of them in a village, or city, or nation, he would have his eye upon him. However misrepre

sented and reproached, he recognizes them as upright before him. However obscure their condition, he views them as the excellent of the earth. However little their faith, he watches the tears with which they cry, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. However encompassed with infirmities, which sometimes perplex others, He, who knows what is the mind of the spirit, knows that they love him. We can only judge of motives by actions. But God judges of actions by motives. He seeth the heart; in consequence of which, in estimating the services of his people, he admits into the amount not only all they do, but all they design to do, and wish to do, when they are hindered; and accepts them according to what they have, and not according to what they have not. Even this is a source of satisfaction to the Christian.

But this knowledge, also, takes in *approbation*. The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous—So he does the way of the ungodly. But the meaning is, he approves it; he commends it. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him; in them that hope in his mercy. He regards them with complacency, as the work of his own hands. He esteems them as his jewels; his bride, his offspring. Their prayer is his delight; their alms, the odour of a sweet smell. Approbation must be valued according to the condition and character of the being from whom it comes. It would be a reproach to pass for the favourite of Satan. The first Christians would also have deemed the friendship of the world no recommendation: for they were satisfied to say, "The world knoweth us not; because it knew him not." A great personage re-

flects a lustre upon those that are near him : a person would be ambitious to be seen intimate with the king. And to live in the affections of the wise and good, says a fine writer, is like walking in an Eastern spice grove. What a dignity is it, then, to walk with God ! What a blessedness to hear *Him* say, " Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee ! " And what shall be done for the man whom the King of kings delighteth to honour ?

For this knowledge is *acknowledgment*. The Apostle, admonishing the Thessalonians, says, " Know them that labour among you, and are over you in the Lord "—that is, own them with respect ; and verbally and practically treat them as their office requires. Thus God claims his people. He owns them in the dispensations of his providence, and in the agency of his grace. He signalizes them in life. He does it often more peculiarly in death : so that his saints are joyful in glory, and shout aloud upon their beds ; and induce their very enemies to exclaim, Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his ! But, above all, they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day, when I make up my jewels. He will confess them before the assembled earth and heavens ; and place them nearer the throne than angels.

Of what importance, then, is the love of God ! And how carefully should we inquire, whether it be shed abroad in our hearts ! Nothing can be a substitute for this affection. Without it, our knowledge, our gifts, our faith itself, are vain. If we have any thing like devotion, it is formality. If we have peace, it is

delusion. If we have safety, it is a refuge of lies. And though we may go to the very door of heaven, and knock, and say, Lord, Lord, open unto us—he will profess, “I never knew you—Depart.”

OCTOBER 28.—EVENING.

“It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.”

2 THESS. i. 6, 7.

THERE is no difficulty in conceiving that “it is a righteous thing” with God to recompense tribulation to those who troubled. It was their desert; and righteousness consists in rendering to all their due—But how does this apply to those who were troubled? Surely, when they have done all that is commanded them, they are unprofitable servants, and their defective obedience deserves condemnation rather than reward. We should not wonder therefore if the Apostle had said that it was a *gracious* thing with God to recompense them. But it is also an act of righteousness. Though it would be injustice to make a man suffer beyond his desert, it is not unjust to reward him beyond his desert. A man is not at liberty to punish sovereignly; but in his favours he is free, and he may do what he will with his own. God is infinitely good: in the covenant of grace he has provided for the acceptance of his people; and they are accepted in the Beloved; and God has bound himself not only to pardon, but even to honour and recompense their services and sufferings. Hence says our Saviour, “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil

against you falsely, for my sake: rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." And hence says Paul to the Hebrews, "God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his Name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." It cannot be supposed that a cup of cold water, given to a disciple in the name of a disciple, could merit eternal life: yet, if the Lord has promised that it shall not lose its reward, it would be an unrighteous thing in him not to reward it.

But what was the blessedness to be recompensed to these Thessalonians? "Rest." This is a representation of the heavenly state frequently given us in the Scriptures. It is sometimes spoken of in allusion to the rest of the Sabbath. Thus the Apostle says, "There remaineth a rest for the people of God:" the word is, as the margin apprizes you, a keeping of Sabbath. To those who now call the Sabbath a delight, and look forward to it with eager desire amidst the toils and cares of the week, the notion is very attractive. By-and-by the Saturday evening of life will come, and they will wipe their hands of every thing earthly, and fall asleep in Jesus, and open their eyes on a Sabbath whose hallowed pleasures will never end. At other times it seems to be spoken of under this name in reference to the destiny of the Jews. Canaan was called "the rest" which the Lord their God gave them, and where, after the bondage of Egypt, and their tedious journeyings in the wilderness, they were to enjoy a settlement abounding with every accommodation and delight. But this was only a shadow of good things to come, a type of a better, even a heavenly country, into which death gives the

true Israelites an abundant entrance. Hence the word reminds us of their freedom from every thing annoying and vexatious here. They will rest from their labours; rest from their cares; rest from their troubles; rest from temptation; rest from sin; and rest from sinners—"There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest."

But observe how they were to enjoy it—you shall have this rest, says the Apostle, "with us"—with us, "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus," who now address you, and wish you grace and peace. Does he mention this with reluctance? No, but with delight. It rejoiced him to think that the poorest in the church of Thessalonica would be fellow-possessors with themselves, residing in the same state, enjoying the same portion. He shews the same noble disposition in another place: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness; which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

Paul would intimate that the blessedness of the righteous will be social. This falls in with all the principles of our nature. We are formed for intercourse; and it is not good for man to be alone. Much of our pleasure is now derived from our connexions. It will also be admitted that many of our pains are derived from the same source. This however does not arise from society itself, but a particular state of it. It is easy to conceive what happiness association could yield us, if certain things were removed from our associates and from ourselves. Hereafter every mental defect, together with every cause of sorrow and

alarm, will be done away; and each will be capable of giving and receiving unalloyed gratification.

It is pleasing to think we shall enjoy this rest with the most endeared and the most dignified society. Grace here teaches our hearts to love all that love the Lord; but there are those who are peculiarly united to us by the ties of nature and friendship, and who are to us as our own souls. Who knows not the anguish of parting with such as these? And how intolerable would be the thought of losing them for ever! But the Scripture forbids the despair. We shall see and hear them again; we shall commune with them again; the intercourse will be renewed to infinite advantage, and be perpetuated for ever. We are commanded to comfort one another with such words—So fully does Revelation countenance our mutual recognitions in the heavenly world. But we shall also sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God. We shall intermix with patriarchs, prophets, apostles—you shall rest with us, says Paul—and *they* were the most eminent of men, men secondary in dignity to the Son of God himself, men who wielded miraculous powers, and foretold things to the end of time. These are persons pre-eminently distinguished from others, and of whom we entertain the most exalted respect. We look at the inanimate image of them in a picture, we read their lives with veneration; and when we reflect on their works, we are ready to exclaim, How happy should we have been to have known them! Yet were they living, and we could have access to them, we should dread as well as desire intercourse with them: we should shrink into nothing before them, as

a sense of our inferiority, and feel embarrassed by delight. But nothing of this feeling will be known hereafter. Whatever distinctions may prevail, the freedom of our enjoyment will be unimpaired by them. Even angels, those glorious beings, will not confound us. The rustic will be easy at the sight and the notice of Gabriel. Yet the greatest essential would be wanting still if we did not enjoy this rest with the Saviour himself—But we shall be for ever with the Lord.

We are therefore, finally, informed of the period of this blessedness—"When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." Not that there is no intermediate state; for, as soon as absent from the body, they are present with the Lord. Yet till then they are not complete in number, in person, in estate. But then the body will be raised and ennobled; then all the redeemed and sanctified will be gathered together unto him; then all his designs on their behalf will be accomplished; then "he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe."

OCTOBER 29.—MORNING.

"In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee."

Ps. lxxxvi. 7.

THIS was the language of David. David was a king and a saint. He was pre-eminently great and good. Yet neither does his rank nor his godliness exempt him from trouble.

But it is well to see what such a man does when trouble cometh upon him. And here we have his resolution: "In the day of my trouble will I call upon thee."

This was the wisest thing he could do; and it is the best thing we can do. For, first. Prayer is enjoined upon us in trouble. The will of God is our rule. And who can be ignorant of his command? Who has not read, "Is any afflicted? Let him pray."

Secondly. Prayer is the design of trouble. He does not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men. He has an end, worthy his wisdom and his goodness, to answer by every trial. It is to bring us to himself; and to bring us nearer to himself. It is to quicken us to pray more frequently, more earnestly—"I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face—in their affliction they will seek me early."

Thirdly. Prayer is the evidence that trouble is sanctified. It is a great thing not to lose a trial. A trial is never neutral in its effect. It always injures, or improves. It is worse than nothing when it sends us to the creature, either in the way of accusation or relief. But when we turn to him that smiteth us; and acknowledge that his judgments are right; and cast ourselves at his feet, resolved, if we perish, *there* to die; we need not say, with Job, "I am afraid of all my sorrows;" but confess, with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

Fourthly. Prayer is the solace of trouble. There is some relief in tears, and therefore nature is provided with them. It eases and soothes the burning heart to pour our grief into the ear of a friend; who

having rejoiced when he rejoiced, will weep when we weep. But how good is it to draw near to God! How delightful is it, like Job, to pour out our tears unto him; and resemble the child that sobs himself asleep in his mother's arms, and on his mother's breast! "A glorious high throne from the beginning," says the Church, "has been the place of our sanctuary." A temple that no evil enters; an asylum that no enemy invades—There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary are at rest.

Fifthly. Prayer is the medium of our deliverance from trouble. For this release, we are allowed to be concerned. But we must seek it from God. And in doing this, we have not only his power to encourage us—and nothing is too hard for him; but, his goodness and love: and like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. Yea, more: we have his faithfulness and truth—that we shall not seek him in vain. He has engaged to appear to our joy; in his own time and way. He has bound himself; and put the bond into our hand: and we can produce it; and plead it; and be surer of the fulfilment, than we are of the continuance of heaven and earth—For heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass away. Here it is—"Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he hath known my Name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him."

OCTOBER 29.—EVENING.

"For God blessed him." 1 CHRON. xxvi. 5.

WHEN Balak sent to hire Balaam, he flattered him by saying, "I know that he whom thou blessest is blessed." The compliment betrays profaneness, ignorance, and falsehood. But the language will justly apply to God. His voice is almighty—His words are realities—His benediction is efficiency—He whom God blesseth is blessed: and none can reverse it. Of this blessing we here read. The subject of it was Obed-edom. The occasion is marked in an earlier portion of the sacred history. It was his entertainment of the ark when David, displeased and terrified by the death of Uzzah, refused to go on with the removal of it to Jerusalem, and carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, where it remained three months.

But what was the nature of this blessing? Good men judge by a rule of their own: they walk by faith, and not by sight. They value no blessings like spiritual blessings, because these are for the soul and eternity. They therefore pray, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation." And this we have reason to believe was the desire and the experience of Obed-edom. But what is here spoken of intends rather a temporal blessing, suited to the dispensation under which he lived, and which abounded much with the promise of the life that now is. Personally considered, he had health and strength, firm nerves, and fine spirits. His undertakings flourished. His possessions were preserved, increased, enjoyed His

domestic comforts were sweetened and relished. His wife was a fruitful vine by the sides of his house. His children like olive plants round about his table. Both before and after the text, mention is made of the number, the ability, and eminence of his sons. It is also said, "The Lord blessed his household—and all that pertained to him, because of the ark of God."

Let us distinguish between the circumstances and the essence of this blessing. We may then ask, Is the case of this good man a singular one? Has not our Saviour said, "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." Have the generous ever repented of their liberality, even on a secular ground? Have the most public-spirited Christians been the least successful even in their worldly affairs? But a man's life consisteth not in the *abundance* of the things that he possesseth. A *little* that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. The blessing of the Lord maketh rich even with competency; and he addeth no sorrow with it. How much more desirable is it to inherit his blessing ourselves, and to leave it to our offspring, than to possess and to bequeath thousands of gold and silver without it!

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." So said God to the selfish and saving

Jews. We say the same to you. Put his word to the trial, wherein he has said, "The liberal soul deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." "He which soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully." Herein we may see how little faith there is in the earth. They *shall* prosper that love Zion. A regard therefore to their own welfare should make men liberal; and if they believed the word of God, there would be forthcoming contributions enough for every private charity and all public institutions. But we are afraid to make God our banker; and cannot rely upon his promise and providence.

Yet, while we are reprov'd, let us also be encouraged, and stand ready to every good work. There are two cases in which we may peculiarly resemble Obed-edom in conduct and condition. The one is when we open our doors, and receive, in a way of Christian hospitality, the Lord's followers or ministers. "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." The other is when, to use the words of Scripture, we have a church in our house. This was the case with Priscilla and Aquila. It was a common thing in the beginning of the Gospel, before places were expressly built for religious assem-

blies. Nor is the practice unknown in many of our villages now. When the preacher has first gone to publish the Gospel, he has been often indebted to some poor rustic who has lent his cottage to the Lord. He has sometimes drawn upon himself reproach and persecution; but the Lord has blessed him. And when also you establish the worship of God in your family, kneeling before his living oracles and offering the sacrifices of prayer and of praise, never imagine the time employed in these exercises lost. You cannot serve God for nought, while the promise and the threatening remain: "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just."

OCTOBER 30.—MORNING.

"Messiah the Prince." DAN. ix. 25.

THIS is not the only character of the Messiah. But we must connect it with every representation we have of him; that his glory may not be injured by his condescension, nor his authority diminished by his kindness. Is he exalted at the right hand of God? It is, to be "a Prince," as well as "a Saviour." Is he a priest? He is "a priest upon his throne."

How is this Prince designated?

He is "the Prince of the *kings of the earth*."

They often think little of him; and, imagining themselves their own, say, Who is Lord over us? But wherein they deal proudly, he is above them. They are all raised by his power; they are all controllable by his will; they are all subservient to his designs; they are all amenable to his tribunal. Hence his avowal—"By me kings reign; and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." Hence the admonition—"Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

He is "the Prince of *peace*." He came to mediate between heaven and earth; and we are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son. Men talk of making their peace with God. If our tears, or works, or alms, could have availed for this purpose, the world would never have witnessed the sufferings of Christ. But *he* made peace by the blood of his Cross. One died for all—And he was more than all. The value of his sacrifice was infinite: and every end that could have been answered by the destruction of a world of sinners has been equally and better answered by the death of the Saviour. Nothing will effectually satisfy an awakened conscience, but what satisfied the justice of God. But, surely *this* will suffice! When, therefore, it is apprehended and applied by faith, we enter into rest; and feel a peace within which passeth all understanding. By his grace, too, he reconciles us to our duty and to our condition. He frees us from

those anxieties and fears which an idolatrous regard to creatures excites; and enables us to be careful for nothing, by casting all our care upon him, who careth for us. Also by subduing our pride and selfishness, by which alone comes contention; and inspiring us with love, the bond of perfectness, we live in harmony with our fellow-creatures. Yea, we are in league with the stones of the field; and the beasts of the field are at peace with us.

He is "the Prince of *life*." Other princes, however powerful, are mortal; and this is a reason why we should not put our trust in them: their breath goeth forth, they return to their dust; in that very day their thoughts perish. But Jesus liveth for ever; and because he lives, his people live also. Other princes, while they are living themselves, cannot impart life to others—though, alas! they often take it away; and sacrifice thousands of their subjects to their own lusts. But Jesus had not only life in himself, but came that we might have life; and have it more abundantly. He procured, and he communicates, and sustains a life superior to that of Adam in Paradise, and to that of angels in glory. This is the promise that God hath promised us, even *eternal* life. And *this* life is in his Son. He therefore that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son hath not life.

He has other designations; and all come short of his praise. But these are sufficient to shew how safe and how happy all they are who have become his subjects. It was a fine compliment that Hiram paid Solomon, when he said, "Surely because the Lord loved Israel, therefore made he thee king over them." How much more has God shewn his good-

ness to his people, in setting this King over his holy hill of Zion! Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them make their boast in the Lord; and in his righteousness be exalted.

Let them also be concerned to approve themselves wise, and good, and loyal subjects to the best of Princes; so that, instead of disgracing him, they may be to him for a name and a praise among all those who shall hear of so great a people.

But woe to those who reject his sceptre! As for these mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring them forth, and slay them before me.

OCTOBER 30.—EVENING.

"And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness."

2 SAM. vi. 12.

Two things may be usefully remarked here. The First is, the fame of the blessing. It was soon known and noticed. The report of it spread in all directions, and even reached the throne—"and it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth to him, because of the ark." The manifestation of the sons of God is principally future. They will hereafter shine forth from every cloud that conceals them, as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The wisdom of their choice, and the advantages resulting from it, will then so convincingly appear, that those who vilify them now will be constrained to say, "We fools counted their

life madness, and their end to be without honour. How are they numbered with the children of God, and their lot is among the saints." But the Lord does not leave his people entirely undistinguished even now. He begins to honour them here. He sets a mark upon their foreheads, that the executioners may pass them by in the day of evil. He sometimes puts such a difference between them and others, that men, profane and infidel men, say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth. Even Balaam exclaimed, How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his. How easily, even in this life, can he bring their enemies to their feet, and make them know that he has loved them! And has he not said, "Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed"?

Let us from hence learn our duty. While we are in the world, we should pray, with David, Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies; or, as it is in the margin, observers. Many eyes are upon us; and though they cannot judge of our experience, they can estimate our conduct. They will be sure to compare it with our profession; and their disposition will not suffer them to make those allowances which candour and truth require. They will magnify infirmities into crimes, and impute the miscarriages of a few to the whole body. Let us then walk in the fear of the Lord because of the reproach of the heathen. Let us put to silence the ignorance of

foolish men: yea, let us constrain them by our good works, which they behold, to glorify God in the day of visitation. Let them see that our religion is not a mere notion, but that there is a reality, an excellency, an efficiency in it that recommends it to every reflecting mind. Let them see the advantages we have derived from it in the government of our tempers, in our readiness to forgive, in our humility when we prosper, in our patience when we suffer, in the confidence and calmness of our minds with regard to every future event. Let them see that we have found what others are seeking after in vain, contentment and happiness. And thus shall we adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and be ever saying to those around us, "Come with us, and we will do you good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

The Second is the influence of it. It doubtless impressed many; but David only is mentioned. He is mentioned because of his eminence—not for its own sake—but relatively to his usefulness. The soul of a prince is no more precious than the soul of a beggar; but when the great are set in motion, they draw others after them. No sooner was David informed of the blessing of God upon Obed-edom for the sake of the ark, than his apprehensions vanished, his zeal was roused, and he resolved to obtain a share of the same goodness—"So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness." And here we see that the proofs others have shewn of the gain of godliness should excite and encourage us to follow their example. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. No improvements in husbandry or trade will be long

confined to individuals. Every useful invention and discovery in the arts and sciences is soon and eagerly adopted by those who are informed of them: as we see in the case of the mariner's compass, and printing, and a thousand other things. Upon this principle, why do not men embrace the Gospel, which is so evidently conducive to the personal and social welfare of mankind? What numbers have recommended it from their own experience, living and dying! Let us repair to a Physician who has only, yet has so often, cured the complaints under which we labour. Let us reflect upon those who have been enlightened, and pardoned, and renewed in the spirit of their minds, and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; and pray, "Bless me, even me also, O my Father"—"We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."

David not only brought up the ark, but with gladness. What we do for God we should do readily and cheerfully. God loves a cheerful giver. The charity of some is like the sour emission obtained from crabs by grinding and pressing them. But it drops from a Christian like a honeycomb, or flows like a living spring. He doth all things without murmuring or disputing, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart. He cannot always claim the promises; yea, they sometimes make him tremble lest he should come short through unbelief: but he always delights in the law of God after the inward man. He cannot always rejoice in the full assurance of hope; but his meat is to do the will of his heavenly Father. His duty is his privilege. The Sabbath and the sanctuary are his attractions; and he finds it good to draw nigh to God.

But wonder not if you meet with opposition and reflection. "As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart." People will commend or excuse warmth in every thing but religion — *There* it is often decried as weakness, or ridiculed as folly. And should we encounter this in our exertions for the cause of God, what are we to do?—Do! go forward. Do! do as David did, who bound the scandal as a garland around his brow, and said, "I will yet be more vile." So, blessed Redeemer! wast thou treated in the days of thy flesh. So didst thou bear the contradiction of sinners against thyself—thy spirit blasphemed, thy words and actions perverted, thy name cast out as evil. May it be enough for us that the disciple be as the Master, and the servant as his Lord. May we go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach; and rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his Name.

OCTOBER 31.—MORNING.

"Prayer shall be made for him continually."

PSALM lxxii. 15.

WE are not only to pray; but to pray without ceasing. We are not only to pray for ourselves; but for others. We are to pray for kings, and all that are in authority; for ministers; for all saints; for even our enemies, who despitely use us, and persecute us; and, what may seem strange, we are to

pray for Jesus Christ. "Prayer also shall be made for him continually."

Is prayer then necessary for *him*? Is he not above the reach of danger, pain, and want? Yes. He who once had not where to lay his head, has all power in heaven and in earth: he dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. The meaning, therefore, cannot be, that prayer should be continually made for him personally; but relatively. Owing to the interest he has in certain objects, what is done for them is done for himself; and so he esteems it. We therefore pray for him, when we pray for his ministers; his ordinances; his Gospel; his Church—in a word—his CAUSE. David, therefore, exemplifying what he had foretold, immediately breaks forth and says—"And blessed be his glorious Name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended."

But *what* should we pray for on his behalf? Our prayers should vary with the state of his cause: but we should always bear four things upon our minds. First, The degree of its resources; that there be always a sufficiency of suitable and able instruments to carry on the work—To this the Saviour himself directs us: "The harvest truly is great; but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into his harvest."—Secondly. The freedom of its administration; that whatever opposes or hinders its progress may be removed. "Pray for us," says the Apostle, "that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified."—Thirdly. The diffusion of its principles; that they may become general and

universal; spreading through every family, neighbourhood, and province and realm. So prayed of old even the pious Jew: "That thy way may be known on earth; thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise thee."—Fourthly. The increase of its glory, as well as its extent: that it may abound more in wisdom, purity, spirituality, charity, and zeal: that the light of the moon may be as the light of the sun; and the light of the sun be sevenfold as the light of seven days: that for brass, he would bring gold; and for iron, silver; and for wood, brass; and for stones, iron. Thus, they that make mention of the Lord are to "give him no rest"—not only until he "establish"—but "make Jerusalem a praise in the whole earth."

But *why* should we be concerned to pray for Him? Consistency requires it. We are the professors of Christ. We profess to be his servants—but can we be wise and good servants, if we are neglectful of our Master's affairs? We profess to be his subjects—but can we be loyal subjects, if we are indifferent to the glory of our Sovereign? We profess to be his friends—but can we be true and faithful friends, unless we make his interests our own; mourn over his dishonour; and rejoice in his prosperity?—Benevolence requires it. The Gospel is the greatest of all blessings to the children of men. Wherever it enters, the wilderness and the solitary place is made glad, and the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose. It is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth; and where it does not save the soul, it yields a thousand advantages to the community. Who would not wish him success? *His* career is the march of truth,

and righteousness, and peace. *He* makes the widow's heart to sing for joy. In *him* the fatherless findeth mercy.

"Blessings abound where'er *He* reigns :
The pris'ner leaps to lose his chains ;
The weary find eternal rest ;
And all the sons of want are bless'd."

—Gratitude requires it. How much do we owe him ! When we consider what he has done, is doing, and will do for us ; all we are, and all we have, appear to be his, by a thousand claims ; and nothing can equal our vileness, if we are not led hourly to ask, What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits ? Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?

But what reason have we to conclude that these prayers for him will be *heard* ? Much every way. The prayers indeed even of good men are not always answered. Sometimes they know not what they ask. And when they implore what would prove evil, God's wisdom and kindness lead him to refuse. But whatsoever we ask according to his will, he heareth us. And has he not commanded us to pray, that his kingdom may come ? Has he not promised it ? Is not the grand condition fulfilled—"When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed ; he shall prolong his days ; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands" ? Can his death be unavailable ? Can the engagements of the everlasting covenant be made void ? We *cannot* pray for him in vain.

But what is necessary to evince that our praying for him is *sincere* ? For there is much prayer that is a mere mockery of God. Out of their own mouths

many will be condemned hereafter; and they would feel themselves condemned already, were it not that the heart is deceitful above all things, as well as desperately wicked. A man prays to redeem his time, and to have his conversation in heaven; and goes and sits in a place of dissipation for the answer. A father prays for the salvation of his child; and does all in his power to leave him affluent, and surrounded with temptations that render his conversion a miracle. A third prays to be—condemned: for he prays, Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us; and he is implacable.—When a man sincerely desires a thing, in proportion as he desires it, he will seek after it; and use all the means placed within his reach to obtain it. When, therefore, a person professes a great concern for a thing, and neglects whatever is necessary to it, we make no scruple to tax him with folly or falsehood. Let us do in religious matters, what we do in other cases—Let us judge of our faith, by our practice; and of our hearts, by our lives.

What then, you say, must we do to prove that our prayers in the cause of Christianity are sincere? Do! Some of you should come forward and offer to go forth as missionaries. What hinders? Nothing in your condition: nothing in your connexions. Nothing but the love of ease; and the fear of suffering; and the want of the *spirit* of the prayer—Arise, O Lord, and plead thine own cause.—Do! Live for him. All cannot go abroad. But all have a sphere in which they may be useful. They may hold forth the word of life by their temper and conversation.—Do! Employ all your influence with others; provoking them to love and to good works.—Do! Give

according to your opportunity and ability—exercising self-denial, to enlarge your ability. Read the whole verse of our text—“And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised.”

OCTOBER 31.—EVENING.

“He hath opened mine eyes.” JOHN ix. 30.

THE miracles which our Saviour performed on the bodies of men awakened peculiar attention; but the changes which he accomplishes in the soul are much more glorious and important. The benefits of the former were limited to time, but those of the latter pervade eternity. Persons might have been the subjects of the one and have perished for ever: but the experience of the other was always accompanied with salvation.

One of the signs and wonders that were to accredit the Messiah was “the recovering of sight to the blind.” And here we have an instance of it. The story is remarkably interesting and instructive—But we may consider the cure as a symbolical representation of the agency of Divine grace in healing the disorder of the mind; and so put the language into the mouth of every Christian, “He hath opened mine eyes.”

They were once blind, and, like this man, were born blind. But the Lord never leaves them as he finds them. He “opens the eyes of their understanding,” and makes them know the things that belong to their peace; and in his light they see light.

The illumination is not perfect at once; and in other things the men of the world may surpass them. But they know themselves, they know the evil of sin, they know the preciousness of the Saviour, and above all things desire to win Christ, and be found in him. The enlightening principally and distinctively consists in a real apprehension of the excellency of Divine things. There is a great difference between a conviction that there is such a being as the Lord Jesus, and such a perception of his glory as attaches us to him; and between a persuasion that there is such a thing as holiness, and a sense of the beauty of it; and between a belief that honey is sweet, and a knowledge of its sweetness: the one derived from report, and the other resulting from relish.

Two effects follow when the things of the Spirit are thus spiritually discerned. The one is a clearer, fuller, firmer conviction of the existence of these things. Their lustre renders them more distinct and prominent. We feel assured that they cannot be fictitious: they must be real, must be of God. And now also our prejudices against them relax and remove; and we are open to conviction, and disposed to do justice to all evidence in their favour; and become studious of them, and long to increase, by every method, our acquaintance with them. For the other is a superlative regard to them. There is now felt an influence in them that fixes the mind, and sways the will and the affections. We now seek those things that are above. The love of Christ constraineth us. To them that believe he is precious. There is no true faith without works; no saving knowledge without obedience. The seat of its resi-

dence is the heart; and the sphere of its activity the whole life.

And has he thus opened your eyes? Then adore and praise your Enlightener. Often dwell upon your former and present condition, and, like the man before us, be found in the temple giving glory to God, and be always inquiring, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?"

Maintain a carriage becoming your privileged condition. You were darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light. It would be shameful in you to strike against the stumblingblocks over which the blind fall. See your danger and your duty. Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Pity and pray for those whose eyes are not yet opened. You would be concerned in other cases of far less moment and misery. You feel even for the blind beggar that sits on the bank, or is led along by his faithful dog. How much more would you be distressed at the sight of a brother, or sister, or mother, or child, in this groping and comfortless condition! Where are your feelings when you behold sinners incapable of spiritual action and enjoyment, and approaching, senseless, the verge of the bottomless pit?

You were once in the same state yourselves, and can therefore sympathise with those who are still in it. O tell them what you see and enjoy! Tell them light is sweet, and what a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the Son of righteousness. It would not indeed be kind to do this unless there was hope

for them. But there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. You cannot open their eyes for them. And they cannot open their own eyes—But there is one to do it who is able, and is equally willing. Tell them what he has done for you. Tell them that he is now within call: that he is at this moment passing by; and never yet refused the prayer of the destitute.

NOVEMBER 1.—MORNING.

"How readeest thou?" LUKE x. 26.

It is well to be able to read. Thousands are not; and so cannot thus agreeably fill up their leisure moments, nor improve their minds by the written communications of others. But whatever a thing be in itself, the *use* we are to make of it, is to determine, whether it be to us—good or evil; a blessing or a curse.

Some will lament for ever that they were taught to read. They never improved so great a talent. Yea, they perverted and abused it. They read books which undermined their principles, defiled their imaginations, and demoralized their lives. But others are thankful for such an attainment. It has afforded them not only gratification and profit; but spiritual improvement, and consolation. One, in reading, has been converted from the error of his ways. Another, has been guided in his experimental and practical doubts and difficulties. A third, has been revived while walking in the midst of trouble.

And if this has been the case while reading other books, how much more while reading the Scriptures

of truth! This volume you are bound, above all other books, to read. It is your duty. It is your privilege—But how readest thou? How *ought* you to read it?

First. You ought to read it as the dictates of Inspiration. You do not, perhaps, deny, or question this; but you ought actually and frequently to impress the mind with it; that when you open these pages, you may say, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." The Apostle admonishes the Hebrews not to turn away from him that speaketh from heaven. He does not say, who *spake*—but who *speaketh*. The address is to be considered as immediate. It is so to us, as well as to those who originally heard it. Had it been just written, it could have had no more authority, and have been no more deserving of attention, than now. How much depends upon this advice! For as we receive the word, so shall we be affected by it. If we regard it as false, it will produce no result. If as human, it will influence as human. But if divine, it will operate divinely. Hence says the Apostle to the Thessalonians; "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

Secondly. Let him that readeth, understand. The Eunuch, returning from Jerusalem in his chariot, was reading; and reading even the prophecies of Isaiah; but Philip said to him, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" To know the meaning of the Scrip-

tures, it is a good thing to read on, till we come to the end of a paragraph or subject, regardless of the divisions in chapters and verses. These breaks are useful, and they are generally made in their proper places; but not always: in consequence of which, the sense is injured or darkened, by the writer's closing before he has finished; or commencing something in the middle of the argument.—Neither should we lay too much stress on a particular word or phrase; but be guided by the natural current of the passage; and endeavour always to apprehend what is the *present* design of the sacred writer. Here good common sense will often do more than the learned affectations of expositors, who frequently elude the solution of a difficult text; and throw doubts into a clear one. While we ought to avail ourselves of every assistance from the labours of others; and, above all, to exercise our own minds; we must be humble in our inquiries, and feel and acknowledge our need of divine guidance, to lead us into all truth. "Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law." So prayed David—and so must we—"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Thus the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err; and without this, the scholar and the genius will for ever go astray. The great impediment to divine knowledge is *the state of the heart*: and as soon as we are made deeply sensible of our need of what the Gospel is designed to afford; and willing to be saved in the Lord's own way; and to walk so as to please him, every thing opens easily and delightfully; and the path of the

just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. But this can only be obtained from "the *Spirit* of truth."

Thirdly. We should read with a view to self-application. Instead of thinking of others—which is too frequently the case—we should think of ourselves; inquiring how it bears upon our own character and condition; and how, as Lord Bacon says, it comes home to our own businesses and bosoms. If I read a threatening—"O my soul, do I stand exposed to this danger?" If I read a promise—"May I claim this blessing?" If I read a reproof or a commendation—"Am I censured by the one? or encouraged by the other?" "Lord, what wilt thou have *me* to do?"

Fourthly. We should read with a determination to reduce what we read to experience and practice. The design of all the instruction contained in the Scripture is to bear upon the conscience and the life. The doctrine is not only according to grace, but according to godliness. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. This is the way to increase with all the increase of God. To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly. If a man do his will, he shall know of his doctrine. We may apply to reading, what the apostle James has said of hearing: "But be ye doers of the word, and not readers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a *reader* of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he

being not a forgetful *reader*, but a *doer* of the work; this man shall be blessed in his deed."

NOVEMBER 1.—EVENING.

"And he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God—" 2 CHRON. xxxiii. 13.

—By an experimental and practical knowledge of him, the effect of converting grace. He had been a monster of iniquity, and seemed beyond the reach of mercy. But he obtained forgiveness; and by his graciously overruled exile and imprisonment, as the means, he was induced to seek the Lord God of his fathers, and he was found of him.

The change was real and amazing, and verified the language of the prophet; "Instead of the thorn shall come up the firtree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtletree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off." All conversion is a turning. In religion, it means a change of views, dispositions, and pursuits, so that we become the reverse of what we were before. With some who use the term, it seems to mean much less than this, and to signify only an impression, a change of opinions, a strong persuasion—not a transformation of mind, not the renewing of the Holy Ghost, not a transition from one moral state to another. When we have heard some persons talking of their conversion under a preacher, and at such a time—for they are often very particular in the date—we have been ready to say, we know not what you were before your conversion, but we know what you are since! But if a man was

proud, and revengeful, and covetous, before his conversion, and remains so after it, where is the change? What should we have thought of Manasseh's conversion, had he, whatever professions he made, continued in his former ways? But there was a change in the whole of his character, conversation, and conduct. He ceased to do evil, and learned to do well. By two things the reality of his conversion shewed itself.

First, he lived some years after it, and thus his religion had time to be developed. This is generally the case with the Lord's people. He calls them out of darkness, that they may walk as children of light. "This people," says he, "have I formed for myself, they shall shew forth my praise." Many seem to view repentance as a preparation, not for life, but only for death. We must not limit the Holy One of Israel. He may call a man at the eleventh hour: but we have reason to believe the cases are very rare; and too much stress is laid by some preachers and some periodicals on these late appearances—conversions which take place a few days or weeks at most before dissolution. Even when persons have obtained that repentance which is unto life, and have died immediately after, though they have died safely, the change must have been less certain to themselves, and less satisfactory to others.

Secondly, by a peculiar turn of Providence, the hand that wounded him also healed; and he "was brought again to Jerusalem into his kingdom." And now is the time to observe him. Many have quickly left the religion of a sick-chamber after their recovery. The serious attention to Divine things which abasement produced, prosperity has soon dis-

sipated. But see the triumph of this man's principles among the snares and dangers of returning prosperity. No sooner is he seated again on the throne, than he sets an example becoming it. He purifies the temple, restores the worship of God, and endeavours to bring back those he had led astray. "He took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peaceofferings and thankofferings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel." Never was there a true convert without zeal of the same kind. As soon as we feel the value of our own souls we shall prize the souls of others; and be concerned to teach transgressors his ways, and to convert sinners unto God. The earnestness we discover may offend the formal, and even the persons we strive to reclaim may deem us intermeddlers, and tell us to keep our religion to ourselves—But this is impossible. This is telling the fire not to burn, and the spring not to flow. "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." And if we bless those who consider the poor, and endeavour to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, how much more should we applaud the man who tries to save a soul from death, and to hide a multitude of sins!

"Ah! Manasseh *could* be useful. He had opportunities and means. One is ready to envy a man who is disposed to do good, and finds himself in the possession of riches, power, authority—a palace!" Yet while some may be peculiarly useful, none are

compelled to be useless. There is some beneficence within the reach of every individual, if he be willing to do it. It is with usefulness as it is with water; it is to be found everywhere, if people will dig enough. Let us seek the praise conferred upon Mary, "She hath done what she could."

But observe the remark of the sacred writer; "Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the Lord their God only." It is said indeed that they worshipped Jehovah only in them; but it was disobedience to the Divine appointment, it was will-worship, it was superstitious. And this no doubt he reproved and endeavoured to repress, but much of the evil he could not hinder. And here we perceive that his religion did not operate so extensively and powerfully as his former depravity had done. It is much easier to seduce than to reclaim, to corrupt than to convert.

And we see this in a very affecting instance. It was the case with his successor and son Amon. "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; and humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more." To leave his kingdom and the reformation he had begun to a son he had depraved by his example, but could not reform by his piety; and, when he saw or heard of his profligacy and impiety, to sigh and exclaim, "Ah! I taught him all this"—was enough to "bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave!"

Be thankful if you were moral before you were pious; and, above all, be grateful if you have been

blessed with the grace of early godliness. From how many snares, evils, and pangs have you been preserved! How pestilential have some been! "One sinner destroyeth much good." What injuries a life of twenty or thirty years of wickedness produces! What miseries must some feel, when, though the riches of Divine mercy have pardoned and renewed them, they think of persons whom they drew aside, and encouraged and emboldened by their example and counsels. These above all things they should endeavour to restore. "But some of them are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and despise reproof. Others are removed to a distance, and we know not where to find them. Others are dead—what can we do here?" Nothing. But seek to be useful to others. And agonize with God, that as you have been a curse, so he would make you a blessing.

 NOVEMBER 2.—MORNING.

"His time in the flesh." 1 PETER iv. 2.

"FLESH" is not to be taken, here, morally; but physically. It is not here used to signify our corruption, but our present existence—as when Paul says, The life that I now live "in the flesh," I live by the faith of the Son of God. It intends, therefore, our life while *in the body*. For we shall not be *in* it always—a period is approaching when the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Our "time" in the flesh varies in circumstances

with regard to individuals. But it has four general characters applicable to all the human race.

First. It is chequered. The young may look forward and view life in the fascinations of hope; and the aged may look back, and more congenially dwell on the gloomy than on the cheerful; and the same man, in the hour of present impression, may feel himself too much elated, or too much depressed with his condition—but the truth is the same. It is neither a paradisiacal, nor a wilderness scene. It is neither entirely dark, nor light; but intermingled sunshine and shade. Who ever found life so smooth as to have no roughness? And whoever had sickness without ease? or sorrow without comfort? And who is now authorized to say, To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant? or, Mine eye shall no more see good?

Secondly. It is short. And short not only as to eternity, and the ages of men before the Flood; but absolutely short. The general duration is threescore years and ten. But much of this is nothing, as to the superior purposes of our being. We do not mean business: this may not only be rendered consistent with religion, but is made by a Christian, who abides with God in his calling, a part of it.—But there is the weakness of infancy, and the childhood of age. There are the deductions of *needful* sleep, and allowed recreation, and unavoidable intercourse. It is often also cut short. How few reach seventy! And those who do, commonly look in vain to find any of the associates of their youth or their maturity. Every thing expressive of brevity is seized by the sacred writers to hold forth the brevity of our time in the flesh—a flower; a flood; a tale; a dream; a

vapour; a ship before the wind; an eagle pouncing on his prey—There is but a step between us and death.

Thirdly. It is uncertain. How can it be otherwise, when we consider the diseases and accidents to which we are continually exposed? and the feebleness of our frame? and the number and delicacy of the organs of which the body is composed? Sixty times every minute, as our pulse tells us, the question is asked, whether we shall live or die. The fool in the Gospel said, I have much goods laid up for many years; soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry: but that very night his soul was required of him. Persons just ready to enter connected life, have been called from marriage rites to attend funeral solemnities. The owners have been just ready to take possession of a new mansion, but have been carried to their long home. And the traveller, starting for his journey, has gone the way of all the earth.

But, fourthly. It is important. Yea, all-important, by reason of its relation to another, and an eternal state. It is not only an introduction to this state—but a preparation for it. It is influentially connected with it, as the sowing with the harvest. Our thoughts, words, and actions, are the seed; and whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. The present is the only season of obtaining justification and renovation: title to heaven, and a meetness for it. *Now* is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.

The same will apply to our doing good, as well as to our gaining good. Our time in the flesh is the only season in which we can glorify God, and serve

our generation! What a treasure then is life! And how concerned should we be to work while it is day, seeing the night cometh wherein no man can work! In this one article the saints below are more privileged than the saints above; and we are persuaded that those who have entered their rest would be willing, were it the pleasure of God, to come down and re-enter this vale of tears, to have the opportunities of usefulness we enjoy—who can be candid towards those who differ from us; forgive injuries; visit and relieve the afflicted; spread the Gospel; teach the ignorant; save souls from death, and hide a multitude of sins. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest.”

NOVEMBER 2.—EVENING.

“When I awake with thy likeness.” PSALMS xvii. 15.

DAVID therefore expected to live after death, and he tells us not only that he should awake, but awake with God’s likeness.

Does he refer to the state of the soul at death? or of the body at the resurrection? or to both? We love not to press a passage of Scripture beyond its proper bounds; neither would we stop short of them. Man is a complex being; and when the dust returns to the earth whence it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it. The Apostle tells us that when the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness; and that the Spirit of him that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken

our mortal bodies. And Watts includes each of these effects in his fine versification of the Psalm.

At death the soul of the believer awakes with his likeness; and the resemblance which commenced in regeneration and advanced in sanctification, is finished in glory: all the remains of sin being then done away, and nothing left but the image of God himself upon all the powers of the mind. What is the body now but a dormitory for the soul to sleep in, rather than a mansion for it to live in? What is our present state but a kind of night-scene? Much of our life now, in the view of angels, must be judged as vain and unmeaning as dreams, and will appear to ourselves hereafter like the vagaries of sleep. Nothing reviewed from eternity will be deemed solid and valuable but what has been connected with the service and enjoyment of God. To what slender dimensions then will the sum of human life be reduced! How few will appear our exercises of sense and reason! And how short our waking intervals! Natural men are entirely asleep as to the purposes of the Divine life—*Thus* indeed Christians cannot sleep as do others. Yet they, even they, comparatively slumber. They regard not many things which would strike them if they were wide awake, as they ought to be. They are often drowsy and insensible; can hardly watch and keep their spiritual senses in exercise; and read, and hear, and pray, and meditate hardly knowing or feeling what they do. It is therefore even to these the Apostle sounds the quickening call, "It is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is your salvation nearer than when you believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand." What a difference between their present and future

experience! When they close their eyes in death they will awake and shake off every slumber; and all will be reality, perception, attention, energy, life. Now in the morning they wake and find themselves in the wilderness; then they will wake and find themselves in Canaan. Now they wake and find themselves among the wicked, who vex and defile them; then they will wake and find themselves with the spirits of just men made perfect, and the innumerable company of angels. Now they wake and find a law, that when they would do good evil is present with them; then they will wake and be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

But man, in his original state, was an embodied creature, and he must be embodied in his final condition. The intermediate and separate state, therefore, is necessarily an imperfect one: for the body, an essential part of human nature, is lying under the incapacities and dishonours of mortality. But this purchase of the Saviour's will be reclaimed: this temple of the Holy Ghost will be re-edified: this companion of the soul will share with it in the work and glories of heaven. And the sacred writers therefore, in referring to the future happiness of believers, commonly lead our views to this consummation. And death is expressed by sleep, peculiarly in reference to the body, and to intimate not only cessation from labour and the enjoyment of repose, but susceptibility of revival. At the resurrection, the body wakes. "Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in dust." They that "sleep in the dust of the earth shall arise"—And believers will awake with his likeness. We know, says the apostle John, that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him

as he is. And this likeness is corporeal as well as spiritual. As we have, in our infirmities, diseases, and dissolution, borne the image of the earthly, so we shall bear the image of the heavenly, when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. Our conversation is in heaven, says the Apostle, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, "who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." A prospect hailed ages before by Job as the ultimate and complete solace and relief of his sufferings—"For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth : and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God : whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another ; though my reins be consumed within me."

"This life's a dream, an empty show ;
But the bright world to which I go
Hath joys substantial and sincere ;
When shall I wake and find me there ?

"O glorious hour ! O blest abode !
I shall be near and like my God !
And flesh and sin no more control
The sacred pleasures of the soul.

"My flesh shall slumber in the ground,
Till the last trumpet's joyful sound ;
Then burst the chains with sweet surprise,
And in my Saviour's image rise."

NOVEMBER 3.—MORNING.

"As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing." 2 Cor. vi. 10.

THIS is the duty; this is the privilege of the Christian. Whether he considers and feels himself in a state of exile—or warfare—or perplexity—or penury—or varying experience—or misapprehension from others; if "sorrowful," he may, and he ought to be able to say—"Yet alway rejoicing."

Though dwelling with strangers around,
And foreign and weary the land,
I homeward to Zion am bound—
The day of release is at hand.
Then, Mesech and Kedar, farewell,
To enter my welcome abode;
With friends and with angels to dwell,
With Jesus, my Saviour and God!

Though constantly summon'd to arms,
And legions against me combine,
I'm calm in the midst of alarms,
My weapons and cause are divine.
A Captain almighty I own;
And, banner'd by faith in his Name,
I shout, ere the battle is won—
I more than a conqueror am!

Perplexings though often I feel,
And mazy the paths that I tread,
My God has been leading me still,
And still he has promised to lead.
The crooked shall all be made straight,
The darkness shall beam into light;
I have but a moment to wait,
And faith shall be turned to sight.

If small my allotment below,
 I will not at others repine :
 Their joy is the gilding of woe,
 Their wealth they must quickly resign.
 Though poor, how much richer am I !
 In want I have all I desire ;
 My treasures, the soul can supply,
 And last when the stars shall expire !

If, weeping and fearing, I pass
 Through changes in state and in frame ;
 Yet, constant in power and grace,
 My Saviour is always the same.
 No shadow of turning he knows,
 Whose bliss is the fountain of mine ;
 And while his eternity flows,
 My happiness cannot decline.

How little the multitude know,
 Or, knowing, how little they prize,
 The spring whence my joys ever flow,
 Or source of my bitterest sighs !
 But both the dear secret reveal,
 That Jesus hath soften'd this heart ;
 And soon all my joys will fulfil,
 And bid all my sighing depart.

NOVEMBER 3.—EVENING.

"But withal prepare me also a lodging : for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you." PHILEMON 22.

THAT is, he trusted that though he was now a prisoner he should be set at liberty, so as to be able to fulfil his ministry again for their furtherance and joy of faith. Had his confidence been inspired by

the Holy Ghost, he would have expressed himself without hesitation; but he had only a hope in his own mind arising from what he deemed probability. Whether this hope was accomplished we are unable to determine; and the learned are divided in their opinion. But he intimated no more than he felt at the time; and his language shews another instance of the Apostle's address in enforcing his plea on the behalf of his object; for if, as he trusted, he should soon visit Philemon, how could his friend see his face in peace, or at least with pleasure, had he refused his request on behalf of Onesimus?

Paul was warm, but there was nothing in him enthusiastical: he feared God, but he was not superstitious: he lived above the world, but he was not a recluse—He never affected to condemn the feelings of humanity. He therefore desired that a lodging might be prepared for him against his arrival. Yet he was not fond of indulgence and show; and therefore a little would content him. He did not require the enlarged and various accommodations of a home, but only the needful conveniences of an inn; not a mansion, but an apartment: such as the Shunamite made for Elisha; "Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither."

And we may rest assured that Philemon would not only readily provide for him, but in his own dwelling; knowing that a man so well educated would not be finical and troublesome; and that one so Christian would be sure to be instructive and useful, and draw down the regards of Heaven. So the house of Obededom was blessed for the sake of the ark. So now

is the Saviour's promise; "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward."

Paul viewed his restored freedom as a privilege and a favour: "I shall be given unto you." In another place he speaks of ministers as "the gifts of Christ." And this is true of their commission, endowments, success, and all opportunities of exertion. It is he that gives them not only a door of utterance, but a door of entrance. It is easy to see what a hinderance of usefulness the confinement of such a man as Paul was. God is able indeed by his almighty power to overrule evil for good: but we must judge of things by their proper and natural tendency; and thus persecution involves the heaviest guilt. It is said of Herod, after the enumeration of his crimes, that "he added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison." This was taking the light from the candlestick, and putting it under a bushel. It was rendering him a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Hence, says Paul to the Thessalonians; "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified." What Christian then ought to be indifferent to the progress of civil liberty, which, justly considered, always includes religious, and affords opportunity for exertion and co-operation in extending the cause of knowledge, truth, righteousness, and peace?

But see the importance and efficiency of prayer. The prayer of Abraham prevailed for the healing of

Abimelech. Joshua by prayer lengthened the day, for Israel to complete their victory. By prayer fifteen years were added to the life of Hezekiah. The church of Jerusalem prayed for Peter's enlargement, and he was delivered by an angel before the prayer-meeting broke up. And what says Paul to the Philippians? "I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Here also he says; "I trust that *through your prayers* I shall be given to you." Sometimes prayer succeeds in obtaining the very blessing itself which is implored: at other times the answer brings a substitute for it; as when Paul besought the Lord to remove the thorn in the flesh, and received the assurance of all-sufficient grace while under it. But the prayer of the righteous shall be granted; and the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, not only when it is offered for himself, but also for others. Here also is a proof that the usefulness of prayer is not confined to the influence of the performance, but includes also success and acquisition. The prayers we offer for ourselves really affect us by the very exercise of the duty. But if our prayers for others benefit them, when at the very time they may be ignorant of our offering them, this must be by God's doing something in a way of answer. This is the very ground and encouragement of our offering them. And the Bible is filled with instances of the accomplishment of such prayers, as it is with commands for the performance of them.

NOVEMBER 4.—MORNING.

"Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him."

MAT. viii. 7.

WE may consider these words as

—An answer to prayer. And let us observe *whose* prayer it was. He never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek *ye* me, in vain. But this Centurion was an alien from the commonwealth of Israel; a Roman; a Gentile. Yet *he* is immediately heard. Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. Whoever I am, let me therefore apply to him, animated by the assurance, Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.

Let us observe, also, *what* prayer it was. It was not a prayer for the petitioner himself; but for another. As he never refused any who addressed him on their own behalf; so he never refused any that addressed him on the account of others. Let this teach and encourage us to pray for others. Let friends pray for friends; and parents for their children; and masters and mistresses for their servants —We are commanded to pray for all men.

We may consider the words as an instance of *condescension*. He was fairer than the children of men; higher than the kings of the earth. All the angels of God worshipped him. Yet no sooner is his goodness implored, than, in a moment, he is ready to go and stand by the side of the pallet of a poor sick slave!—I will come and heal him. The master was

very humane and compassionate, or he would not have taken the trouble to send to our Lord on the behalf of one considered so much below him. What is a slave, to many an owner? No more than a beast of burden. David found an Egyptian in the field, who had eaten no bread nor drunk any water for three days and three nights: "And David said unto him, To whom belondest thou? and whence art thou? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick." A wretch! How unlike him was this Centurion! But he, even *he*, is surprised, and scarcely knows how to accept of the Saviour's offer—Yea, he even deems it condescension to *himself*—I am not worthy that *thou* shouldst come under *my* roof. And shall not *we* condescend to men of low estate? "Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?"

We may consider the words as a display of *power*. I will come and attend him, would be the language of a friend. I will come and pray with him, would be the language of a minister. I will come and examine his case, and see if I can afford him relief, would be the language of the physician. But Jesus speaks like himself—I will come and heal him. He knew his own sufficiency. And the Centurion knew it. It was the principle of his reasoning—"Though I am not a commander-in-chief, but a subordinate officer, yet it is not necessary even for *me* to go to a place in order to act. My *word* is enough—I say to one of my soldiers, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. How much more, O Lord! are all

creatures and events under thy control! Thy word runneth very swiftly. Neither disease nor death can withstand it." So our Saviour understood him. He therefore admired him, and said, I have not found so great faith; no, not in Israel. And we should have the same strong confidence in his ability—That he is mighty to save—able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him. For

We may consider the words as affording *an emblem of the salvation of the sinner*. Whatever some may think of human nature, we are fallen creatures: we are spiritually diseased; and there is no health in us; and we are ready to perish; and are incapable of revering ourselves; but he says, Lo! I come—I will come and heal him. It was the design of his coming in the flesh—The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. It is the purpose of his coming now in the agency of his grace—I will bring them, says he, health and cure. He heals them meritoriously, by his stripes; efficiently, by his Spirit; instrumentally, by his word, ordinances, and providences. The recovery, indeed, he is pleased to carry on by degrees. He could, by one application, yea, by one volition, remove all their complaints: but it does not comport with his wisdom. His people, therefore, continue his patients; and are no more than convalescents all through life. But if slow, the recovery is sure—Nothing can elude his skill, or baffle his remedy. When dying, they may say with Baxter, "Almost well"—And when they enter Immanuel's land, the inhabitants shall no more say, I am sick.

NOVEMBER 4.—EVENING.

"FOR THEIR SALES I SANCTIFIED MYSELF, that they also might be sanctified."

JOHN xvii. 19.

HERE are two sanctifications spoken of, very distinguishable from, yet intimately connected with each other—The sanctification of Christ; and the sanctification of Christians. Let this exercise turn on **THE SANCTIFICATION OF CHRIST**—"For their sales I sanctify myself."

Here the word to sanctify does not mean to renovate or purify; but to consecrate or devote. He could not be sanctified in the former sense, because his nature was not depraved or defiled by sin. But, under the law, when persons or things were dedicated to God, they were considered as hallowed or holy, and to use them for any common purpose was to profane them. Thus the Sabbath was sanctified, and the tabernacle, and the temple, with the vessels thereof. Thus Jesus devoted himself to the service of God in the salvation of sinners. "Lo!" said he, "I come to do thy will, O God. I consecrate myself to be an atonement, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. I will suffer, the just for the unjust, and bring them nigh who were once far off, by my blood." Here he displays the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us. For,

Observe the *voluntariness* of the consecration. He does not say, I am sanctified, but, "*I sanctify myself.*" He was not passive in the business; neither was he compelled. No man, says he, taketh my life from me; I lay it down of myself. *He* made himself of no reputation. It was therefore with him a

matter of the freest choice, and of the fullest purpose. A man walking by the side of a river, may see a fellow-creature in danger of drowning, and may plunge in to save him, and perish himself in the attempt. He may be considered as falling a sacrifice to his kindness; but the sacrifice with him was only eventual, not designed. Nothing was accidental in the sufferings of Christ; nothing was unforeseen: he assumed our nature, and entered our world, for this very end—The Son of man came, not *to be* ministered unto, but *to* minister, and *to* give his life a ransom for many.

Observe also the *relativeness* of the consecration: "For *their* sakes I sanctify myself"—Not his own. He had no sin of his own to expiate. He was therefore cut off, but not for himself. He was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted; but he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed. And he suffered not only for our sakes, but in our stead. His death was not only for our good, but for our redemption; and we are expressly assured that he redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. He was therefore a true and proper sacrifice for sin. As such he was typified by the sacrifices under the law. The people were guilty. The High Priest confessed their sins, and laid his hands on the head of the victim; and having thus transferred their guilt to the substitute, he slew the victim, and taking the blood in a basin, entered the holiest of all, and sprinkled the mercy-seat, and burned incense; and then came forth and blessed the absolved congregation. ~~And thus once in the end of the world Christ~~

appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; and then entered the holy place, there to appear in the presence of God for us; and to them that look for him will he come forth and appear a second time without sin unto salvation.

Nor must we forget the *expensiveness* of the dedication. This it is not in our power to estimate. We must possess the same feelings, and bear the same load, before language or imagination, however lively, can enable us to do anything like justice to the sufferings he endured. The history is not indeed silent. It tells—how he was born in a stable and laid in a manger; became a man of sorrows; had not where to lay his head; endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; bore every kind of reproach; and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. But a veil is drawn over his internal anguish. What, before human treachery or violence had yet seized him, made him to be sore amazed and very heavy? What led him to say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;" while his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground? How well, blessed Jesus! mayest thou say, "It is nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

Finally, let us keep in mind the *unworthiness* and *vileness* of the subjects on whose behalf he thus devoted himself. We read of benefactors: but how few of them have ever exercised self-denial! And when they have made sacrifices, for whom have they suffered? Men have hazarded their lives in the field; they have been wounded, they have been

slain. But they bled and died for their country, their friends, their families. But, "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Here every Christian will look at his character and his own life: he will review his years of unregeneracy; his omissions of duty; his actual offences; his heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; his depraved nature itself shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin; and can he only glance at this, and not exclaim, with self-abasement and wonder—

"Was it for crimes that *I* had done
He groan'd upon the tree?
 Amazing pity, grace unknown,
 And love beyond degree!"

NOVEMBER 5.—MORNING.

"For their sakes I sanctify myself, THAT THEY ALSO MIGHT BE
 SANCTIFIED."JOHN xvii. 19.

HAVING viewed the sanctification of Christ, let me consider the SANCTIFICATION OF CHRISTIANS—"That they also might be sanctified."

This sanctification differs much from the former. It does indeed take in the notion of dedication. In this sense, believers are sanctified; and they wish to regard all they are and all they have as the Lord's, not only by claim, but by consecration. And in their

experience there has been a time in which they "gave their own selves unto the Lord," saying, "Lord, I am thine, save me." But to dispose them for this surrender, and that they may be vessels unto honour, sanctified and made meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work, a change must pass upon them. Renovation and purification are necessary. New principles must be implanted; and the promise fulfilled; "I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Christians therefore are new creatures, concerning whom he says, This people I have formed for myself, they shall shew forth my praise. This sanctification therefore is very superior to natural amiableness of temper, and outward reformation, and mere morality. It includes morality: but it includes much more; it includes piety: and while it secures the practice of all good works, it sees that the heart is right with God. At present indeed the work is not complete; but it is begun, and is advancing. The subjects of it love holiness; they mourn over the remains of sin as their greatest burden, and long and pray to be sanctified wholly—body, soul, and spirit.

But let us see what a connexion it has with the sacrifice of Christ—"For their sakes," says he, "I sanctify myself, *that they also* might be sanctified." Now this clearly shews us the importance of it. We may err in our estimation of things, but *his* judgment is always according to truth; and here we see his judgment.

And how precious and invaluable must he have deemed this sanctification, since he considered nothing too great or expensive to procure it for us! He well

know that unless we were delivered from the bondage of corruption, and renewed in the spirit of our minds, we could have no meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, and must be incapable of enjoying or serving God here. This therefore was his aim in dying. "He gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." He "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

And we learn hence, That they do not improve his death aright who seek from it hope, but not holiness. Such a desire has nothing spiritual in it; neither can it be realized. Jesus came by water as well as by blood; and these are as inseparable in their application to the soul as they were in their effusion from the cross. What then can we think of those who derive from his death even a licence to sin; and who, when reprov'd for their evil ways, satisfy themselves that Christ has satisfied for them; and not only for their past, but for all their future transgressions—and so they have nothing to fear! But they have every thing to fear. At present they have no part nor lot in the matter; and if they die as they are, Christ will profit them nothing—For he has said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."

It is equally obvious that they are badly instructed in the mystery of sanctification who think to gain it from some slavish, legal, superstitious, self-righteous methods of their own, instead of repairing to the sufferings of Christ, the only fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. It is the blood of Jesus that alone cleanseth us from all sin; and this is true as to our

purification, not only from the guilt, but also the love and power of it. Our old man is crucified with him. There is no true holiness separate from the cross. There he obtained for us not only eternal redemption; but all the supplies of grace.

And as the death of Christ is the source from which the Spirit is derived, so it is the principal means by which he works; for he works rationally, and in a way of argument and motive. And what can equal the view of his sufferings? There we see most strikingly the evil of sin; and there we behold the love of Christ, which most powerfully constrains us. At the sight of this the Christian rises, and says, Did he devote himself thus for me, and shall I not dedicate myself to him? Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

NOVEMBER 5.—EVENING.

"This God is our God for ever and ever." Ps. xlviii. 14.

THIS is the language of a proprietary in God. And it is founded in truth. In the covenant of grace established not with them, but with the surety, he has, so to speak, made over himself to his people, saying—I will be thy God. I am thine and all that I have; my perfections; my relations; my works; my word; my ordinances; my dispensations. I am thy salvation. To thee I am all in all. Hence there is no proprietary like this, not only for the value of it, but the reality itself. Justly speaking, nothing else is our *own*. Our time is not our own. Our wealth is not our own. Our children are not our own. Our bodies, our souls are not our own—But God is our own—And God, even our *own* God, shall bless us.

It is the language of an assured proprietary. This God is *our* God. The relation may be known and claimed. And with what a repetition does David express it!—"I will love thee, O Lord, *my* strength. The Lord is *my* rock, and *my* fortress, and *my* deliverer; *my* God, *my* strength, in whom I will trust; *my* buckler, and the horn of *my* salvation, and *my* high tower." Here are no less, in a few words, than nine appropriations. And how desirable is it to be able to ascertain and express our own interest in all his engagements!

"When I can say, my God is mine,
When I can feel thy glories shine,
I tread the world beneath my feet,
And all that earth calls good and great."

Then I am satisfied with his goodness. But can the thing be made out?—and how? They mistake who suppose this relation results from our choosing him, and giving ourselves to him. We do this indeed; but it is by his grace. And, in us, this is the effect, and not the cause. But as it is the effect, it is therefore the evidence. And in this way we are to trace back the stream to the fountain; making our calling, and thereby our election, sure. If we have chosen him, we may be assured he has chosen us; and if we love him, we may be assured he loves us; for one is the consequence of the other—We love him because he first loved us.

It is the language of a permanent proprietary. This God is our God for *ever and ever*. Without this, the blessedness would make us miserable. The dearer and greater a treasure be, the more alive we are to anxiety and fear; and nothing but the assur-

ance of its safety can enable us cordially to enjoy it. No confidence is so well founded as the Christian's. Every other possession is precarious. Every other relation is breaking up. But he may, he can say, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It is the language of an exulting proprietary. Boasting is excluded by the law of faith. But what boasting? All glorying in ourselves; but not in God. "My soul," says David, "shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad." "*This* is my beloved, and *this* is my friend, O ye daughters of Jerusalem — What is yours?" So here. *This* God is our God for ever and ever—What is yours, O ye sons of men? Their rock is not as our rock; our enemies themselves being judges.

NOVEMBER 6.—MORNING.

"There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets." DAN. ii. 28.

DANIEL was perhaps the most blameless character recorded in the Scriptures. Of course *He* is excepted from the comparison, who was "fairer than the children of men." Neither do we mean to intimate that Daniel was sinless. He had an evil heart to lament before God; but, with regard to his conduct before men, as a professor of religion, nothing is laid to his

charge. And what an honour was it to be spoken of, while living—and while young, too—by a prophet—in company with Noah and Job—as one of those who were most likely to have power with God, as intercessors!

Here we see his humility. The king said unto him, "Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof? Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded, cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets." Why does he mention this, but because he would prevent the commendation of himself? and that the only wise God should have the glory that was due unto his holy Name? And thus another fine character, jealous of the divine honour, said to his sovereign, "It is not in me. God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." The most eminent of all characters in the Christian Church also said, "By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Contrast with these, two of the most famous of the Heathen philosophers and moralists: one of whom said—"That we have riches is of the gods; but that we have wisdom, is of ourselves." And the other—"A good man is, in one respect, above the gods themselves: for they are good by the necessity of nature; but he is good by choice!"

But what is the praise that Daniel transfers from himself to God? The revelation of secrets. Men

are fond of secrets. With regard to themselves, they are always wishful to pry into futurity. Almanacks must therefore have something to feed this humour, or half their number would not be sold. Mistresses as well as servant-maids; the old as well as the young; would show their palms to the fortune-teller, were it not for the fear of ridicule. Were the Witch of Endor alive, many would repair to her; and, like Saul, consult the Devil himself at second-hand. Envy makes us inquisitive, with regard to rivals; fear, with regard to enemies; and love, with regard to friends. It was curiosity operating in the way of attachment, that led Peter to enquire after the destination of John—"Lord, and what shall this man do?" But the Lord did not even encourage *this*—"What is that to thee? follow thou me."

The secret things belong unto God: but things that are revealed are for us, and for our children. Concerning many things he is silent; and, where he says nothing, we are not to be wise above what is written.

But He *can* reveal secrets. His understanding is infinite. Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

He *has* revealed secrets. He enabled Daniel to explain the import of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and foretell the succession of the four monarchies. He shewed Moses what the Jews would be at this very hour. What a divine prerogative was prophecy! We may conjecture, but we really know not, what a day may bring forth. We may argue from causes to

effects; but the existence and operation of the causes themselves depend upon the will of another. We may infer from probabilities: but the natural tendencies of things are liable to accidental derangements; and the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Besides, as to the predictions of Scripture, many of them regarded things so remote, that what *immediately* preceded them could not possibly be discerned. And others regarded events the most unlikely to take place of all occurrences in the world—And yet, when we look into history, we see how it accords with these announcements. How can we account for this, but by admitting, that prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost?

He *does* reveal secrets. How many now living has he called out of darkness into his marvellous light! Not that he has communicated to their minds things new in themselves; but they were new to them. The sun had been shining; but they had been in the dark, because they were blind. All the doctrine was in the Bible before: but he now leads them into all truth; and shews them not only the reality of divine things, but their importance and glory. Give a man a taste for a book of music, or science of any kind; and he will see a thousand things entirely new to him, though he possessed the work before. So “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. but the spiritual judgeth all things.” So the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he shews them his covenant, and their interest in its engage-

ments and provisions. And what a discovery is this! How anxious will every awakened mind be to possess it! Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. And what is the promise? "I will give him to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."—He also shews them the secrets of his providence, as well as of his grace. They know what he is doing, and what he will do. They know that he is fulfilling his own word, and making all things to work together for their good. They know that "behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face;" and that, even when he slays them, they have reason to trust in him. "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein."

He *will* reveal secrets. Yes; there is "a day, in the which," says the Apostle, "God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel." Then will be developed—dreadful secrets. Then many, who had a name here, will be disowned. They had honoured him with their lips, and gained the notice of their fellow-creatures; but their hearts had been far from him. And what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?—Pleasing secrets. Then, they who are now deemed the enemies of the Cross of Christ, will be found to have been its friends. Then, they who are now considered as indifferent to holiness and good works, will appear to have mourned for sin, and prayed for purity. Then, the tear dropped upon the Bible in the closet; the private act of charity; the

frequent intercession for others, will be displayed and commended—He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.—Divine secrets. He will shew, why he permitted the entrance of moral evil; delayed so long the coming of his Son; suffered his Gospel to be so impeded, and his Church to be so afflicted; and more than justify all his ways to men. What is now perplexing, will be made plain. What now seems disorderly, will be arranged. What now seems jarring, will be harmonized. What now seems defective, will be complete. And then, not as now, from faith, but from sight, the acknowledgment will be made, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity: just and right is he." To many these mysteries are already explained—When shall we have an inheritance with the saints in light?

NOVEMBER 6.—EVENING.

"The everlasting God." GEN. xxi. 33.

THE eternity of God is the most sublime and astonishing subject on which our thoughts can fix. Let us not darken counsel by words without knowledge. Three things may be said; and this is all we can say.

First. He will have no end. If we carry our views forward, and add millions of ages to millions of years, till the mind be lost in the computation, we shall make no progress in the duration of the eternal God. A week is too long for the beauty and

fragrance of some flowers. There are insects that are brought forth, and pass the several stages of their being, and die in a single day. The life of man is compared to a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. But the oak in the forest survives several generations of possessors and observers. The earth continues through all the changes of its inhabitants. The river Jordan, which the Jews crossed, continues to wind its uneven course; and the mount Ararat, on which Noah stepped out of the ark, still remains to be seen. The heavenly bodies shine on above the reach of our revolutionary system. Yet this is only comparatively true: nothing is absolutely durable—"They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." Some creatures will endure for ever. Angels are imperishable. So are the spirits of just men made perfect. The soul will view, untouched, the destruction of the universe: yea, the body, though material, will be immortalized. But none of these will live for ever *like* God. He is the fountain of life; all other beings are streams flowing from him, and sustained by him. They are not immortal of themselves, but by his pleasure and bounty. But he has life necessarily and independently in himself, and is unaffected by any external cause. Therefore it is said, "He only hath immortality."

Secondly, he never had a beginning. The space of time which has elapsed since the creation seems long: the globe is near six thousand years old. But through an immensity of duration, of which we can

form no idea, God had been living, equal to his own happiness, and able to do whatsoever he pleased. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even *from* everlasting," as well as "*to* everlasting, thou art God." It is needless to observe, that this prerogative is entirely and infinitely peculiar to God. Thus he is "the first" as well as "the last." He inhabiteth eternity, and indeed constitutes it; for, properly speaking, eternity is nothing else but the duration of his being and agency.

Thirdly, there is no change in his being, no diminution, no increase, no variableness or shadow of turning. We speak of the past, the present, and the future: but "I am" is his name, and his memorial in all generations. Our continuance is computed by periods: but his duration is one permanent now. We exist by parcels; we existed partly yesterday, we exist partly to-day, and shall exist partly to-morrow: but he possesses and enjoys his whole being at once. We never continue in one stay: infancy grows into manhood, and manhood descends into old age. Even in the Christian, the outward man perisheth, and the inward man is renewed day by day; and even in heaven the saints will be changed from glory into glory: but he says, "I the Lord change not." He was never *less*, and he will never be *more* wise, and holy, and happy, than he is. He will never be older than he is, and he was never younger. One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day.

"Why, this is an abyss in which our thoughts are swallowed up." It is. And observe the inference we draw from it. Are we not therefore chargeable with

the greatest absurdity, when we reject a doctrine because we cannot comprehend it? Is not this to make our understanding the measure of truth? How much reality is there that does not come within the reach of our senses, or of our reason!—we hear of mysteries. There are such in the Scriptures; and are there none in Nature? There is no doctrine we are called to believe in Revelation more difficult than this eternity of God. Every notion we can form of it involves in it a seeming inconsistency, and a real inexplicability: yet every Deist admits it; and the man that denied it would render himself universally ridiculous.

Let us therefore adore a Being who cannot, by searching, be found out unto perfection; and have grace whereby we may worship him acceptably, with reverence and with godly fear. And, convinced of the infinite distance there is between him and us, let us admire his condescension. How evident is it that he does not stand in need of us, and is “exalted above all blessing and praise!” Yet we and our mean affairs have always engaged his attention—“What is man that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? and that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?”

The eternity of God should take off our attachment and dependence from things below. Creatures, however agreeable or powerful, are “less than nothing and vanity.” “Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; wherein is he to be accounted of? Trust in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” “Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the

Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Creatures may die, but he liveth; and blessed be our Rock, and let the God of our salvation be exalted." "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which, by the Gospel, is preached unto you." The heavens and the earth may pass away; but his covenant is everlasting, ordered in all things, and sure. As he is eternal, O Christian, thy happiness, which is bound up in him, is secure. He is the strength of thy heart; he is thy portion for ever. Realize thy union with him in all thy exigencies, feebleness, and dangers. "THE ETERNAL GOD is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

NOVEMBER 7.—MORNING.

"For neither did his brethren believe in him." JOHN vii. 5.

How is this charge to be understood? Two distinctions or limitations are necessary. First. It cannot be taken literally as to the name—"his brethren." Even those who very properly reject the notion of her perpetual virginity, do not suppose that these were really the children of Mary, our Lord's mother. The question which divides the ancients and the moderns turns upon this—whether they were the offspring of Joseph by a former marriage; or whether

they were born of Salome, Mary's sister, and so were our Lord's cousins-german. The latter is the more probable conclusion. Among the Jews, kinsmen in various degrees were called brethren. Abraham and Lot were uncle and nephew; yet, says the former to the latter, "We are brethren." The meaning therefore is, that our Lord's more near and remote kindred did not believe on him. But, secondly, this cannot be taken universally, as to the fact. For three of his brethren, at least, were found in the number of his apostles—Simon, and Jude, and James the less, who is expressly called the Lord's brother. The Scripture does not gratify our curiosity: we know but little of Mary's or Joseph's relations: but they seem to have been numerous; and the language before us must intimate that not only some, but comparatively many, of them had no real faith in him.

This is a very surprising announcement. But it is very instructive. Does it not favour the truth of Christianity? Had all our Lord's relations recommended and followed him, his cause might have looked human and suspicious. We know what advantage Mahomet derived from the attachment and employment of his kindred. But here every appearance of family contrivance is excluded; and we see that our Lord did not act by rules of carnal policy. His kingdom was not of this world; his Gospel was left to its own evidence and energy; and derived no assistance from the auxiliaries of error, superstition, or idolatry.

We see also what evidence may be resisted, and what means may be rendered ineffectual, by the depravity of human nature. These men had attended his preaching, and he spake as never man spake

They had often heard his conversation. They had received many instructions, reproofs, and encouragements from him, in a manner the most adapted to insure success. They had gone up with him to the festivals, and had seen his devotion. Some of them were present when he turned the water into wine. They had seen him open the eyes of the blind. Yes; these very men, "his brethren, therefore, said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judæa, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world." As his relations, they must have known the circumstances of his birth; the appearance of the angel to the shepherds; the journey of the wise men; the prophesying of Simeon and Anna; the testimony of John; the descent of the Holy Ghost in his baptism; his holy and heavenly life—Nevertheless, such were their prejudices and worldly dispositions, that they did not believe on him. It was not *evidence* they wanted; nor is it a want of evidence that induces persons to reject him now. The source of infidelity is not intellectual, but moral. Were it not criminal, it would not be punishable. But this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world; but men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. We think some means *must* be irresistible—but we forget that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked—Neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

And from hence, we need not wonder if inferior characters are unsuccessful in their pious attempts. Ministers may be faithful and zealous, and yet be

constrained to complain, "Who hath believed our report?" Masters may be wise and good: yet what a servant had Elisha, in Gehazi! Parents should do every thing in their power for the spiritual welfare of their children; and, in a general way, they may hope for success: but let them not wonder if, in some instances, even their tears, and examples, and entreaties are vain!

Let those who have irreligious relatives think of Jesus. He was in this point tempted as they are. He can sympathise with them. He remembers the feelings of his heart, when even his own kindred turned away from him.

Hence none will be saved by mere relationship. Let none say, therefore, within themselves, We have Abraham to our father. The parable tells us of one in hell, who called Abraham father; and was refused by him the least gratification. It is a mercy to have pious connexions: but religion is a personal thing: and if we refuse to tread in their steps, the blessing will be turned into a curse: and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when we shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God; and we ourselves shut out.

Finally. It is better to be of the spiritual kindred of Jesus, than of his family according to the flesh. When, therefore, the woman exclaimed, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked;" he himself replied, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." The spiritual relation to him can never be dissolved; and it will insure every thing essential to our safety, honour, wealth, power, and happiness, for ever. As the natural relation to him was not

saving, so it was necessarily confined to few. But this lies open to all. "Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

NOVEMBER 7.—EVENING.

"We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened."

2 COR. v. 4.

By "*this tabernacle*" the Apostle means the body, which is the same to the soul as a dwelling to the inhabitant. Only it is observable that he does not call it a palace, a mansion, a house, but a tabernacle. Paul was familiar with the structure of such a kind of residence, for he was by craft a tent-maker. He knew that it had a roof, but no foundation; that it was a temporary accommodation, a movable abode, easily taken down, easily injured, easily overturned, easily destroyed. Do what you will with your bodies, they are no better than tabernacles, earthly tabernacles. Nurse them, pamper them, dress them, adorn them, idolize them, as you please; dust they are, and unto dust shall they return.

But see how he distinguishes the soul from the body, and places it above the body. He speaks of the body as if it did not belong to our persons: "*We that are in this tabernacle*"—as if we could

live and act without it. And this is possible. The soul is the man. The soul is the inhabitant. It is in the body, but not of it. It is immaterial, immortal, and capable of endless improvement. We cannot save the dwelling, but we may save the inhabitant. And should not this be our supreme concern? Does not he who knows the value of the soul, from the price he paid for the redemption of it, ask, "What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Yet there are persons who live as if they deemed the soul unworthy of a moment's thought; yea, and they often die so too. They send for the physician; they employ the lawyer, they dispose of their substance; they arrange their funerals, and tell their friends where and how they choose to be buried: but not a word escapes them concerning the nobler and never-dying part—and none of the cruel and infamous wretches in the room will dare to break the delusion, and ask, What, have you no soul? Is this disposed of? Is this provided for? Where will this be found in the day of the Lord Jesus?

We have seen their residence; let us hear their complaint—"We that are in this tabernacle *do groan, being burdened.*" With what? The oppressions are numberless. There are the common evils of life. We need not read the Scriptures to know that earth is a vale of tears, and that man is born to trouble. Who is secure from failure in their schemes? from worldly losses? family bereavements? bodily accidents and diseases? But, common as they are, some might have supposed that the friends of the Almighty would be exempted from these calamities.

Yet many are the afflictions of the righteous. They have frequently more of these sufferings than others. The husbandman does not prune the bramble, but the vine. The stones designed for the temple above require more cutting and polishing than those which are for the common wall. Correction is not for strangers, but children—"What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" Neither is a Christian required to be senseless under these afflictions. They are not joyous, but grievous; and only yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to those that are *exercised thereby*. He is no more to despise the chastening of the Lord than to faint when he is rebuked of him. In some respects he feels these troubles more than others: for he cannot have recourse to the diversions and stupefactions of the world under them: he sees in them all the dreadful evil of sin: he often fears they are proofs of God's anger towards him; and trembles lest they should not be sanctified.

There are also the hatred and opposition of the world. What did the Maccabean Jews, and the first Christians, and our own forefathers, suffer? We do well to remember the former times, and compare them with our own. Yet what cannot be done legally may be done really; and many wives, children, servants, and dependents, are at this hour enduring persecution, even in this country. The strongest ties of affection towards a man will, upon conversion, relax and loosen, like the cords of life at the breaking up of the constitution; and what was warm friendship before, degenerates into mere civility, perhaps into open malignity. The carnal mind is enmity against God: the tongue can no man tame. They

that go forth to the Redeemer without the camp must bear his reproach. The people of the world will never act justly and candidly towards real religion. They always affect to pity or despise it. It is weakness, or derangement, or enthusiasm, or mercenariness, or hypocrisy—"speaking evil of you"—"cruel mockings—"

There are also grievous temptations. What do *some* suffer from this quarter! Yet each Christian, as knowing only his own heart's bitterness, is ready to exclaim, "No one endures such temptations as *I* do—They not only attend me in the world, but follow me to the throne of God and the table of the Lord—They often lay waste my comfort, and I fear will prove my destruction at last—The enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead." Yet is not the Christian life always spoken of as a warfare? And did not even Paul and his fellows say, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places?"

But there is nothing with which the Christian is so much oppressed as his sins. "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me to bear"—At first in the guilt of them, till by believing he enters into rest—Afterwards in the remains of them. When I would do good, says he, evil is present with me, and how to perform that which is good I find not; O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? He is a stranger to Divine grace whose im-

perfections are not his afflictions. The Christian mourns over those infirmities which are not even viewed by others as sins: such as wandering thoughts and cold affections in duty. He has a renewed and tender conscience; and, like the apple of the eye, a mote will pain it. To love purity, and feel pollution—to be eager to advance, and be hindered by baffling detentions—to wish to be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, and never be able to put any thing out of his hand that is not marred and spoiled—to love the Saviour, and yet grieve his Holy Spirit, and pierce the very bosom on which he leans—Here is enough to make him groan, being burdened. It is said of that beautiful bird, the bird of paradise, that when it is caught and caged, it never ceases to sigh till it is set free. "Just such is the Christian"—Nothing will satisfy him but the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

NOVEMBER 8.—MORNING.

"And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" MATT. IX. 11.

THIS is connected with a concise narrative of the conversion of the writer of this Gospel. For the account of himself is furnished by himself.—It is a delicate thing for a man to write concerning himself: but the sacred authors are above all suspicion. They are always faithful and impartial; and their only aim is truth. Though Matthew here speaks of himself.

the reference was unavoidable; and he only introduces the servant, for the sake of the Master.

The case was this. After leaving the privacy of Nazareth, our Lord came and dwelt in Capernaum. This town, as it was situated on the lake of Galilee, gave him an opportunity to pass easily in the fishing boats of his followers to any parts of the adjoining country—"And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man sitting at the receipt of custom:" that is, he was receiving the tolls from the goods landed and embarked on the quay. As Luke tells us, that he made a great feast, and bade many, it is probable he was possessed of considerable property; and, from the common character of publicans, we might be tempted to conclude, that it was the produce of illegal exaction. But it would be invidious to draw such an inference. Even a publican was not necessarily wicked; and the consciousness Zaccheus had of freedom from extortion is obvious from his appeal; "If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." It is even the duty of official agents to be exact and full in lawful demands. We will therefore take it for granted that Matthew was rightfully engaged when our Saviour took knowledge of him; and, as Divine favour has been shewn towards many others recorded in the Scriptures, while filling up the duties of their station, we learn that diligence in our calling is acceptable to God, as well as approved of men. The angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds while keeping their flocks by night, and announced the birth of the Messiah. Saul was seeking his father's asses when Samuel met him, and anointed him king over Israel. While drawing water at the well, Re-

becca, and Rachael, and Zipporah, found each a husband—The woman of Samaria found the Saviour of the world.

Here it may be asked, Was our Lord's thus meeting with Matthew the effect of chance, or of design? To this question we boldly answer, Of design. There is nothing accidental in the conversion of a sinner. If a man be saved, and called with a holy calling, in time, it is according to God's purpose and grace given him in Christ Jesus before the world began.

—"And he saith to him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him." He hath a mighty voice. He upholds all things by the word of his power. By the same word he made them all. He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. He said, Let there be light, and there was light. So it was in the old creation; and, in the new, he calleth things which are not, and they appear. As the address was instantaneous, so the obedience was immediate. What a change did the call produce in the soul of this man! How did it enlighten his mind, and inflame his heart! Doubtless his head was filled with worldly cares; but this voice, like a charm, dispossesses him. The meanness of our Saviour's appearance, and the lowness of his attendants, weigh nothing with him. He was now in prosperity; he was to leave a gainful office; and perhaps saw before him only reproach and persecution: but he is satisfied; and would rather be a poor minister of Christ, than a rich officer of Cæsar. In a case of such magnitude, it might be supposed that he would have required some time to consider and examine matters. But, like Paul, he confers not with flesh and blood. The King's business

requires haste. True obedience is always prompt and unreserved — He immediately followed him. O blessed Jesus, may thy call to us be so effectual, that *when* thou sayest, "Seek ye my face;" our hearts may answer, "Thy face Lord, will we seek." And, at thy bidding, may we arise, and, forsaking every carnal pursuit and worldly attachment, follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth!

Though Matthew formally surrendered his office, and all its concerns, we have no reason to believe that he sacrificed his effects. Rather, we are persuaded that he carefully secured them, to be properly used and applied. Whatever we possess at the time of our calling may be consecrated to the Redeemer, and advantageously employed in his service, and the cause of benevolence. And when the heart is open, the hand and the house cannot be shut. Matthew therefore makes an entertainment for our Lord: and, "behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples." These persons had formerly visited Matthew; partly for business, and partly from pleasure: now they came, invited by him with the hope of their deriving benefit from our Saviour's conversation. "Who knows," says he, "but the voice that has reached my heart may also call them by his grace?" How invariably is such a disposition found in every subject of divine grace! Come with us, said Moses to Hobab, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. O taste and see, says David, that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. Come, and see him, said the woman of Samaria to her neighbours. In the same spirit Matthew makes a feast, to which he calls his old friends

and companions. And our Saviour gave them the cheerful, though not the sinful, meeting: teaching us thereby not to be repulsive in our manners—nor to refuse social intercourse. Of two things, however, we should be careful—To design good as our Saviour did, when we enter company—and also to remember the difference there is between him and us. He had no corruption within for temptation to operate upon; while we are easily receptive of corrupt impressions; and must always watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation.

—But the Pharisees, pious souls! when they saw this, were scandalized. Yet, as Satan always loves to get over the hedge where the fence is lowest, and as he assailed Eve apart from her husband; so they, from fear, do not express their dissatisfaction to our Lord himself, but “said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?” What did they mean? It was the tradition of the Elders, that the sanctified and devout should never be seen in company with the wicked. Affecting superior sanctity, they acted upon this principle themselves; and said, “Stand by thyself; come not near to me; I am holier than thou.” And they here insinuate, that if Jesus was what he professed to be, he would shun such characters as he was now with. And they seem even to feel a concern for his honour. All this was mere pretence, supported by malice and envy. They were strangers to every feeling of piety or benevolence. They strained at a gnat, and swallowed a camel. They made long prayers for a pretence, and devoured widows’ houses. They were wolves in sheep’s clothing: sepulchres painted without, and full of rottenness within.

If we are Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile, we shall be severe towards ourselves, and candid towards others. We shall see more evil in our own hearts than we can ever see in the conduct of our fellow-creatures. And though, in proportion as we are pure and heavenly, we *must* feel whatever is contrary thereto, we shall bewail it before God, rather than complain of it to men. And never shall we, when the character is fair, and the life blameless, go a motive-hunting, and indulge in the vileness of suspicion. Let us not judge, that we be not judged. Let us remember, that he who knows what is in man, represents censoriousness as the *offspring* and *proof* of hypocrisy. "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then thou shalt see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." O for more of that charity that "thinketh no evil; that rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth—beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things!"

NOVEMBER 8.—EVENING.

"But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." MATT. ix. 12.

To perceive the force of these words, we must remember the design of them. They are in justifi-

cation of our Lord's conduct. Matthew, having been called by his grace to follow him, made an entertainment, to which he invited his former friends and companions; hoping that they might derive advantage from the intercourse. But when the Pharisees saw it, they were offended, and said to his disciples, "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" Though the murmur was not addressed to *himself*, it concerned himself; and he was acquainted with it: and though the complainers were undeserving of his notice—and he was under no obligation to vindicate what he was doing—he said, "I am about my proper business. I have not mistaken the objects of my attention. I came to seek and to save that which was lost. I could now have been enjoying the company of angels in heaven. My mixing, on such an occasion, with publicans and sinners, is not agreeable in itself—but I entered the world as a physician. Where should a physician be, but among the disordered and dying? They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

The vindication insinuates the real condition of mankind. They are diseased. We refer to their moral maladies. The soul has its disorders, as well as the body; and the disorders of the soul are worse than those of the body. They vitiate a nobler part; they expose to a greater danger. The consequence of the one is only temporal death; the result of the other is death eternal. These maladies are the effects of the Fall; and they may be seen in the errors of the judgment—the rebellion of the will—the pollution of the conscience—the sensuality of the affections—the debasement and violence of the passions.

We are sometimes blamed for degrading human nature. But we do not undervalue it, as the workmanship of God; or as to its physical and intellectual powers: but only as to its moral state and propensities. And here, not only the language of the Liturgy, but all Scripture, and history, and observation, and experience, proclaim that "there is no health in us."

It also gives an implied character of himself. He is every thing that fallen, perishing creatures can need; and he stands in the same relation to them as a physician to his patients. "I am the Lord that healeth thee," is a proclamation that well becomes his lips. Job disclaimed his friends as "physicians of no value." But this can never be applied to the Lord Jesus. In all things in this office, he has the pre-eminence. Yea, he not only stands without comparison, but alone—there is salvation in none other. But *he* *heals* every complaint. No case, however difficult, baffles his skill. No case, however desperate, resists the power of his applications. He is always at home. Always accessible. Always delighted to attend. He only requires our submission to his management. He cures without money and without price.

It also describes those who disregard, and those who value him. They who reject him are "the whole." None are *really* whole: for there is none righteous: no, not one. But they are so as to apprehension and experience. And such have always been awfully numerous. Such was Paul, "while alive without the law once." Such was the Pharisee that went up into the temple to pray. Such were all the Pharisees, who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. Such

were the Laodiceans, who said, "We are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Such were Solomon's generation, who were pure in their own eyes, and not washed from their filthiness. Such, also, are they who, though they make no pretensions to self-righteousness, are satisfied with themselves; the careless, the worldly, who live without one serious thought of their souls and eternity. Yea, such, too, are they who receive the charge in theory, and acknowledge it, as they do any other Bible sentiment; but there rest—not impressed with the truth so as to urge them to the Saviour—and so he will profit them nothing.

They who value him are "the sick." They are sensible of their malady. They have a clear and deep conviction of their guilt, and depravity, and helplessness. They are thrown into the consternation persons would feel if they discovered they had taken the plague. They feel pain. They forebode death. They exclaim, What must I do to be saved! They no longer relish their former pursuits and pleasures. They loathe sin, and can never be reconciled to it again. Their cure engages all their solicitude. And, finding that there is a Saviour, and a great one, they are soon at his feet, crying, "Heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee." How infinitely desirable and delightful does the Physician now appear! Who but He? They cheerfully put themselves under his care. They implicitly follow his orders. Their motto is, "If by any means." Their inquiry, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" With what eagerness do they inquire after symptoms of cure! With what pleasure do they perceive and feel signs of returning health! "I bless God I have a little appetite for the

bread of life—I have a little strength for spiritual exercises—Perfect that which concerneth me. Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever—Forsake not the work of thine own hands.”

NOVEMBER 9.—MORNING

“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”
DEUT. xxxiii. 27.

How various and striking are the representations which God has given of himself in his word! They all correspond with the state and wants of his people; and are adapted and designed to fill them with everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. Here we are told that he is their *Defender* and their *Supporter*—

“The eternal God is *thy refuge*.” A refuge reminds us of exposure. Dangers encompass them on every side. Their enemies are numberless; and, according to the Apostle, the greatest of them are not visible: “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” They cannot defend themselves; and creatures, also, however disposed and powerful, are unable to secure them. But their defence is of God, who saveth the upright in heart. He is not only their protector, but their protection. It is only in his covenant engagements, and perfections, and presence, and providence, that they can realize their safety. But, encouraging themselves in the Lord their God, they may be emboldened into

confidence, and even triumph, and say, with the Apostle, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And this is the interest that awakens their chief anxiety. While they are here, their outward concerns have their claims; but, "one thing is needful." Temporal comforts, as far as they are good for us, are secured: but these may be injured and destroyed; not because God is not able to preserve them, but because he is wise, and knows that there are cases in which the loss of them will be more profitable than the possession. But spiritual blessings are "the sure mercies of David." Whatever becomes of the trader, the Christian is secure. The outward man may perish, but the inward man shall be renewed day by day. "I give unto them," says the Saviour, "eternal life; and they shall never perish."

—"And *underneath* are the everlasting arms." Are his people then children? The mother upholds the helpless babe. Sometimes the knee bears the pleasing load; but when she would press it to her bosom, or convey it sleeping to the bed of repose, her arms softly sustain it. "And as one whom his mother comforteth," saith God, "so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted." Are they invalids? How soon is the strength of the patient reduced, and another is required to raise and remove him from posture to posture, and from place to place! And thus "He giveth power to the faint and to them that

have no might he increaseth strength." Are they heavy-laden? Sin is a burden too heavy for them to bear. The guilt of it often bows down their spirits; and the remains of it constrain them to complain, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" They frequently feel a load of cares, and wants, and crosses, and griefs. "Lord," say they, "I am oppressed, undertake for me." And the promise says, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." And thus it has always been. They have frequently looked forward with dread and despondence: but when the afflictions arrived, they found grace to help in time of need; and as their days so was their strength. Yea, they were not only supported, but, in the multitude of their thoughts within them, his comforts delighted their souls.

There is one individual to whom this will peculiarly apply. It is you, O aged believer. The evil days are now come, in which you have little pleasure from outward things. Many of your connexions have fallen off, one after another, like leaves in autumn. Lover and friend have been removed from you, and your acquaintance into darkness. Your memory is unfaithful. Your senses begin to fail. The eye and the ear are becoming dim of seeing and dull of hearing. The limbs decline: the hands and the knees tremble. Fear is in the way. The grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails. But while you cry, "Cast me not off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength faileth," he who has borne you from the belly, and carried you from the womb, says, "And even to your old age I am he; and even

to hoar hairs will I carry you : I have made, and I will bear ; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

NOVEMBER 9.—EVENING.

"And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing."

LUKE xv. 5.

JESUS is the speaker, and he refers to himself. The allusion is metaphorical, and regards him under one of the most endearing characters he sustains—The Shepherd.

The address was occasioned by the nature of his audience and the insinuation of his enemies. "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him"—drunkards, adulterers, swearers, liars, Sabbath-breakers. The proverb says, Like begets like ; and there is much truth in the old adage, Shew me a man's company, and I will shew you his character. Accordingly, "the Pharisees, and the Scribes," pious souls ! as if alarmed for the interests of morality, and pretending that the freedom of his conduct was incompatible with the sanctity that should distinguish a Teacher sent from God, "murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." The apparent difficulty was to be solved by an easy distinction which they were not prepared or disposed to make. Our Lord was among these sinners, not because he loved their sins, but would save their souls ; or, as he explained himself on a similar reproach, he was among them as a physician walks the wards of an hospital, not because he is charmed with disease, but in order to prescribe for his patients : "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Here he has another

equally striking justification. He spake this parable unto them, saying, "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it"—he belabours it with his rod till it pants again? No such thing—"he layeth it on his shoulders"—complaining of the dangers he has incurred, the many weary steps he has taken, the sufferings he has endured in the research? No—but "REJOICING." Blessed Jesus, how well couldst thou say, "I am the good Shepherd!"

He not only seeks and saves—but, whatever it may cost him, he does it with joy. In the anticipation of it, he "rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men." When he was actually becoming incarnate, he said, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God. I delight to do thy will; yea, thy law is within my heart." With regard to his obtaining eternal redemption for us by his blood, he said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" See him at the well of Sychar. The disciples had left him hungry, and had gone away into the city to buy meat. But when they returned and spread the entertainment before him, and said, "Master, eat;" he said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." He refers to the pleasure he had just experienced in the conversion of the woman of Samaria, and in the approaching salvation of her neighbours by her means—This was his repast: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."—"He layeth it on his shoulders, REJOICING."

It is the joy of *success*. Nothing is more mortifying than to labour in vain, especially when we take great pains, and make great sacrifices. But how pleasing and delightful is it to see the fruit of our exertions! How delighted is the soldier, after his marchings, privations, hardships, conflicts, and wounds, to retire in peace, and share the spoils of victory and the applause of his king and his country! "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." And this is the very image the prophet applies to the Messiah: "He shall see his seed." "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." Paul and his companions call the Thessalonians their "glory and joy." Yet they were only ministers by whom they believed. If converts are the glory and joy of those who are only the instruments of their conversion, how much more are they the glory and joy of him who is the author of it!

It is the joy of *benevolence*. No pleasure is so unselfish; so pure; so blissful in prospect, and in review, as the pleasure of doing good. But this pleasure will always be in proportion to the degree of benevolent disposition in the benefactor. Who then can imagine the measure of delight in the communication of his favours *He* must enjoy, "whose heart is made of tenderness," who, when he was rich, for our sakes became poor, and died that we might live? Oh that we were as willing to be blessed as he is to deliver and to indulge us! Then the giver and the receiver would rejoice together.

The joy is *encouraging*. The awakened and con-

vinced sinner feels his need of strong consolation. But why should he despond? Why should he ask, will he receive me if I apply to him? Does not the Saviour command him to look? Does he not invite him to come? Does he not complain that he will not come? And does not his application afford him pleasure? In pleading with you therefore, O sinner, we have to urge *his* interest as well as your *own*. You have long enough dishonoured him, and grieved his Holy Spirit. Surely now you ought to delight him; and there is one thing by which you may be sure to do it. Retire with weeping and supplication to his footstool; and cry, Lord, save, I perish; and thy sorrows and sighs will yield him as much satisfaction as the songs of angels—"The prayer of the upright is his delight."

The joy is *exemplary*. As Christians, we must not only depend upon him, but resemble him; not only glory in his cross, but tread in his steps. We are commanded to walk in love as Christ also hath loved us; and are assured that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. Let therefore his grief be our grief; let his joy be our joy; and let his joy be fulfilled in us. Let us spare no exertions, let us grudge no sacrifices, in our concern to save sinners. Let the work be its own reward. Let the very doing of it be our pleasure. It is what he himself enjoins and expects. "And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." The persons intended are angels and saints. The former readily comply: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. And can the latter

refuse? *They* who have themselves been recovered and restored? *They* who have known the misery of sin, and the joy of his salvation? Can *they* see the grace of God and not be glad?

NOVEMBER 10.—MORNING.

"I am the resurrection and the life." JOHN XI. 25.

THERE is a spiritual resurrection and life, which all the subjects of divine grace derived from him. But here the sense is determined by the connexion. "Thy brother," said he to Martha, "shall rise again." But as he did not specify the time, she feared to apply the assurance to her present distress, or supposed that the consolation was to be drawn from the general resurrection. "Martha said unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." To excite her immediate hope, he reminds her of his own character and resources; and says, "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" There must be a very peculiar relation between him and the resurrection to life, to justify the strength of this language. It may be exemplified in various illustrations.

He is the resurrection and the life, as he is the announcer of the doctrine. For it is a truth of pure revelation. Reason could never have discovered it. The men of wisdom at Athens, the Stoical and the Epicurean philosophers, however widely they differed from each other, agreed in deriding this sentiment; and deemed Paul a babbler for preaching it. How inexplicable the re-union and re-animation of our scattered dust!—Where now are the bodies that

trod the earth before the Flood! But even these bodies, through whatever changes they have passed, shall be restored and revived! Even Adam and Eve in their flesh shall see God, and be clothed in higher perfection than Eden ever knew! But *who* abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel? It is true that David, and even Job, rejoiced in the expectation of this glorious event; and many allusions and expressions in the Old Testament shew, that the Jewish Church not only believed in a future state, but in the redemption of the body from the grave. But the book in which they are contained is called "the word of Christ;" and the Spirit that testifieth these things is called "the Spirit of Christ." For, as the sun scatters some light before his rising; so the Saviour commenced his discoveries before his incarnation; he rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men. But by-and-by he came in person and preached the kingdom of heaven. How simple and sublime were his discourses! And with what an awful motive did he commend his doctrine to every man's conscience in the sight of God! He drew back the veil that hid the future; and presented the elements on fire, the opening tombs, and the dead rising to meet their Judge—"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." He also ordered his apostles to go forth and publish, and also record it; and they did so, the Lord working with them, and confirming their word with signs following.

He is the resurrection and the life, as he affords the pledge. Under each of the three distinguishing periods of the world, the body, as well as the soul, had been received up into glory. Before the Flood, Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not, for God took him. The Law beheld Elijah elevated to heaven in a chariot of fire. In the days of the Gospel Jesus Christ passed through the regions of the dead, and reached the crown he now wears. And there is a union between him and his people. He is the head, and they are the members; and because he lives, they shall live also. Yea, says the Apostle, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

He is the resurrection and the life, as he procures the privilege. To him we meritoriously owe all the blessings we possess. Are we justified and sanctified? In the Lord we have righteousness and strength. And are we raised from the dead? "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming." He has redeemed our whole nature; and the body being ransomed, as well as the spirit, by no less a price than his own blood, shall be equally claimed, and renewed, and glorified.

He is the resurrection and the life, as he is the pattern. For we shall rise, not like Adam, but like Him. "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such

are they also that are earthy ; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." In his rising from the dead, we see the model of our own resurrection ; and the grandeur of our own destiny. We imagine, says Paul, whatever is admirable and splendid in his glorified humanity ; and we look for nothing less in ourselves—" We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." At present the body is vile : not as the workmanship of God ; but as defiled by sin, as degraded by disease, and especially as the spoil of worms, in the corruption of the grave. What a hinderance ! what a burden ! what a loathsomeness, is the body of this death ! But then, by a change the most marvellous, it will have the same excellences as the body of God : " So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption ; it is raised in incorruption : it is sown in dishonour ; it is raised in glory : it is sown in weakness ; it is raised in power : it is sown a natural body ; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

He is the resurrection and the life, as he achieves the work. Hence he said to his hearers, " This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life : and I will raise him up at the last day." What a power will this require ! But nothing is too hard for him. His almighty fiat will, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, pervade the depths of the sea.

penetrate the recesses of the earth; and gather the remnants of death, and give them organization, and life, and sight, and voice—for ever!

Happy they who are the children of the resurrection: and who will be able to welcome the Restorer of all things—Lo! this is our God, we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

For though, as an event, the resurrection will be universal; as a privilege, it will be limited. Every eye will see him. But how many will wail because of him!

NOVEMBER 10.—EVENING.

“Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.” 1 PET. ii. 7.

YET there are many to whom he is not precious who yet believe, and would be offended if they were called infidels. Peter cannot therefore refer to every kind of belief. There is a faith which is without works, and dead, being alone. But “the faith of God” is operative. It “worketh by love;” and especially love to the Saviour.

When we consider how much depends upon faith: that it is the principle of all genuine religion; that it is the medium of our justification; that we are saved through faith; and that by faith we live and walk: it must be of great importance to know whether we are the subjects of it; and accordingly we are commanded to “examine ourselves whether we be in the faith.” And here we are furnished with one of the most pleasing and convincing evidences of the fact. It is the endearment of the Lord Jesus. Is he in our

view fairer than the children of men? Is he altogether lovely? all our salvation and all our desire? our glory and our joy? He is so to them that believe—To them: “that believe he is precious.”

But if this preciousness be the evidence of faith, it is no less the consequence of it. The saints in light do not require faith to endear him. They no longer walk by faith, but by sight. Ah! ye spirits of just men made perfect, in whose number we now reckon many of our own connexions, you see him as he is, and are satisfied by beholding his face in righteousness! But if he is made precious to us in this world, it must be by faith. For, first, it is by faith that we gain our information concerning him. We cannot love him without knowing him: but it is faith alone that reveals him to the mind, and tells us where he is, and what he is, and what he possesses, and what he has done, and suffered, and promised. And, secondly, it is only by faith we can, when he is known, make use of him for all the purposes he is ordained to accomplish. He is the refuge, and he is the food of the soul: but a refuge cannot secure us unless it be entered; and food cannot nourish us unless it be eaten: but this application to him, and of him, is the work of faith. It is not a mere notion, but an actual experience, that attaches the Christian to Christ. He has “received him,” and received him “full of grace and truth.” He has found him infinitely suited to all his wants, and adequate to his relief. Yea, he has healed his broken heart; he has calmed his troubled conscience; he has made him free indeed; he has given him boldness and access with confidence into the holiest of all. And he does not need to be told that all this is the effect of believing

on the name of the only-begotten Son of God. Thirdly, without faith we have no complacency in him. We cannot esteem and rejoice in any thing unless we feel some congeniality with it. "They that are after the flesh do mind," that is, love, savour, and relish, "the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the spirit." And to "be spiritually minded is life and peace." Christ is a holy, spiritual, heavenly Saviour. He was named Jesus because he was to save his people from their sins; and he gave himself for them, that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. A natural man therefore can have no delight in him or communion with him; "for what communion hath light with darkness, or what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" But to a believer he is precious because he has this principle of conformity. He has the Spirit of Christ; and he received this Spirit not by the works of the law, but by the hearing of faith. His heart is purified; and the heart is purified by faith. He is sanctified; and we are sanctified by faith that is in him.

It follows from the admission of this truth that the reason why he is not more precious is, because of our remaining unbelief. Wherefore let us "pray always that our God would count us worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us, and we in him."

NOVEMBER 11.—MORNING.

"He is precious." 1 Pet. ii. 7.

WE have seen to whom he is precious. "To them that believe." Let us now ask, what proofs do they give of this preciousness? And in what seasons do they peculiarly realize the force of it?

In evidence of this preciousness, see how he fills their minds. To the miser his money is precious, and therefore his mind dwells upon it: the child is precious to the mother, and therefore she cannot forget it—So the believer thinks of Jesus, and his thoughts of him are frequent and pleasant. "My meditation of him shall be sweet. How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God, how great is the sum of them!—when I awake I am still with thee." See how he employs his tongue. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. The impressions made upon our feelings by an object pre-eminently dear and interesting can hardly be restrained. When the Pharisees desired our Lord to silence the multitude who were acclaiming him in the temple, he answered, "If these should hold their peace the stones would cry out." And when Peter and John were ordered by the council to speak no more in the name of Jesus, they replied, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." David therefore says, "My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation, all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof." And he could equally reckon upon the disposition of others: "Thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; to make

known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom." See also what sacrifices they are willing to make for him. For him, says Paul, I have suffered the loss of all things. The noble army of martyrs followed him to prison and to death. There is the same spirit in believers now, and they evince it as far as opportunity allows. They go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For his sake they endure the sneers of neighbours, the frowns of friends, the menaces of superiors. For his sake they give up the world; and all their sins, though dear as a right eye, or profitable as a right hand; yea, and forsake all that they have, as far as it comes in competition with him. Their regard appears too in their valuing every thing in relation to him. They are never so pleased with the works of nature as when they are emblems of his beauty and glory. They are never so delighted with ordinances as when they are mediums of communion with him. The Bible is most precious, as it is the word of Christ, and testifies of him. Heaven is most attractive as a place in which they shall be with him to behold his glory. No cause interests them like his. Their very souls are identified with it. They are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, and the reproach of it is their burden: while no news equals the success of his affairs, and the increase of his empire. In a word, he is so dear and essential to them, that nothing can be a substitute for him on earth or in heaven; while he can be a substitute for any thing—for every thing: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no more; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and

there shall be no herd in the stalls : yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Thus he is always undeniably precious to them that believe: yet there are seasons in which they peculiarly feel the force of it. Such is the day of effectual calling. If ever food is relished, it is when we are hungry. If ever we prize the physician, it is when we are sick, and long for health and cure. Our Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit, to convince us of sin, and to glorify himself; and the former is necessary to the latter. When we see our true character and condition as sinners, then the proud looks are humbled, and the lofty looks are laid low, and the Lord alone is exalted.

Such is the Sabbath. It is named, in honour of him, "the Lord's day." It is to bring him to our remembrance as rising from the dead, and entering into his rest after finishing the work that was given him to do. His people hold some communion with him through the week; but week days are always in a degree worldly days. They have some glimpses of him, and some words from him, in passing through their ordinary concerns. But they want larger and more intimate intercourse with their best friend. And when the Sabbath comes they take him to their retirement, and he manifests himself to them. And they go to his own house, where they see his power and glory in the sanctuary, and praise him with joyful lips.

Such is the period of holy fellowship at his table. In reference to this, where is the believer who has not been able to say, I sat under his shadow with delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste? In no other duty have we such views of him as here. We

see him in the very act of dying for us. He is evidently set forth crucified among us. As a risen Saviour he comes and shews us his hands and his feet, and assures us that because he lives we shall live also.

Such is the day of trouble. A friend is born for adversity, and endeared by the time of need; but many who wear the name are then found to withdraw themselves. But he comes near—and must come near, if his word can be trusted—"I will be with thee in trouble." He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and in all our affliction he is afflicted. Human friendship, when sincere and lively, is limited. But nothing is too hard for the Lord. He can comfort us in all our tribulation; and turn the shadow of death into the morning.

Such is a dying day. The day of trouble may come, the day of death will come; and if it does not bring Christ with it!!!—But if he is with us when heart and flesh fail; if we can by faith view Jesus as having put away our sin by the sacrifice of himself, as going to prepare a place for us, and as coming again to receive us to himself, that where he is there we may be also; this will turn the chamber of sickness into the house of God and the gate of heaven—we shall be joyful in glory, and shout aloud upon our beds—

"Jesus, the vision of thy face
Hath overpowering charms;
Scarce shall I feel death's cold embrace,
If Christ be in my arms.

"Then, while ye hear my heart-strings break,
How sweet my moments roll!
A mortal paleness on my cheek,
But glory in my soul."

NOVEMBER 11.—EVENING.

I rejoice in thy salvation." 1 SAM. ii. 1.

THESE are the words of Hannah, a very pious and highly accomplished female, to whom the Jews were so much indebted for one of their finest public characters. For Samuel was given in answer to her prayers: he was trained and formed by her instructions; and he was early dedicated to God, at the expense of her self-denial. She also edified her own generation, and she continues to edify ours, by her composition—"Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I REJOICE IN THY SALVATION."—Let us notice this part of her song, and let us take the subject in the highest sense of which it is susceptible. There are many salvations which God accomplishes. But there is one which excelleth in glory, and to which the term is pre-eminently, if not exclusively applied in the Scripture. In this salvation every believer rejoices.

He rejoices in the discovery of it. He is pained indeed to think that as yet multitudes of his fellow-creatures have never heard of it; and he prays that his way may be known on earth, his saving health among all nations. But he is grateful that to him is the word of this salvation sent. There was a time, indeed, when he treated it with indifference; but when he began to see and feel his perishing condition, and to exclaim, with the jailer, What must I do to be saved? he received this intelligence as Hagar did the angel's kindness, when he opened her eyes, and shewed her a well; or as the Grecians heard the

Roman Consul's proclamation of liberty; when they cried for hours, Soter, Soter—Saviour, Saviour!

He rejoices in the properties of this salvation. In the freeness of it—that it requires no qualifications, no conditions; and is without money, and without price. In the purity of it—that it not only contains pardoning mercy, but sanctifying grace; and is designed to save him from his sins, which he now feels to be his worst enemies. In the perpetuity of it—that he who begins a good work will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: that he who believes *hath* everlasting life, and shall *never* come into condemnation. In the extensiveness of it—that Jesus gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time; and that this salvation is prepared before the face of all people: a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel.

He rejoices in the hope of it. This hope admits of various degrees, and the joy will be influenced by them. The lowest degree of it may serve to keep the mind from despair: as a weak bough will sustain a man drowning, till a firmer support comes to his relief. But there is a lively hope; there is an abounding in hope; there is the full assurance of hope—this will fill us with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. In other cases thousands rejoice in hope, who will never obtain possession of the object of it. But the hope of Christians maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them.

He rejoices in the experience of it. For he not only apprehends it as a desirable and future good, but he has a present actual participation of it. He feels the influence of it in his conscience, in his heart,

in his life. And if a man be not saved on this side the grave, he will never be saved on the other. "We," says the Apostle, "who have believed, do enter into rest." And "Blessed," says David, "is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance: in thy Name shall they rejoice all the day; and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted."

He rejoices in the completion of it. For though now he is enlightened, yet it is with the illumination of the dawn, not of the day. Though now he is sanctified, he is renewed but in part. Though justified and adopted, he does not always know his condition, and never enjoys all the privileges of it. He has the earnest, but not the inheritance. He has a few of the grapes of Eschol, but does not yet command the vineyards of Canaan. But when that which is perfect shall come, then that which is in part shall be done away. In pursuit of which he can say, with David, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is *fulness* of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be *satisfied*, when I awake, with thy likeness."

And yet the enemy of souls tells the young, that religion is an utter enemy to enjoyment! Yet the world supposes that Zion is the metropolis of gloom and sadness. But, "as well the singers as the players on instruments are *there*." And they who have made the trial know that her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. And the God of truth has said—"Behold, my servants shall sing for

joy of heart; but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit." Christians have a thousand things to rejoice in; but this is the chief, *the salvation of God*. And there is enough in *this* to inspire joy in the midst of every loss and trial. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat: the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

NOVEMBER 12.—MORNING.

"So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."
DEUT. xxxii. 12.

CONSISTENCY is a quality which a writer finds it no easy thing to maintain, when he brings forward a character. The higher, and the more peculiar, and the more original the character be, the more is the difficulty increased. But when God is introduced, the difficulty becomes supreme. For, "to whom will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One." From their knowledge of the general principles of their nature, which are the same in all, men may, with tolerable accuracy, speak of men; and describe how an individual would act in a given relation or condition. But for men to speak of God; and to represent him in all his attributes and actions, as that nothing shall fall short of an infinitely perfect Being, is what never would have been accomplished without inspiration. But we find this in the Scriptures; because holy men of God wrote as they were

moved by the Holy Ghost. And hence, though the sacred writers bring God forth in every page—we may almost say, in every sentence—he always appears in character; that is, in character with himself.

One thing, however, must be admitted—and it is by no means inconsistent with this—that, in the revelation with which we have been favoured, God has conformed himself to our modes of apprehension and expression. This was necessary, to render him at once intelligible and impressive. This therefore shews us not only his wisdom, but condescension; and dignity is never degraded by condescension. Thus he speaks unto us, as unto children, with whom imitation is every thing; and levies a tax upon all the world of nature, to furnish images of himself.

There is no relation he so commonly assumes as the parental. Nor need we wonder at this, when we consider that there is combined in it every thing at once venerable and endearing—that it appeals to the present sympathies of the heart—and aids our devotion by means even of our very instincts. And observe how he assumes it. Sometimes he takes the affection of the father: and we read—"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him"—"I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." Sometimes he appropriates the tenderness of the mother: and we read—"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." At other times he descends lower; and borrows from the animal, and especially the feathered tribes: and we read—"He shall cover thee with his feathers; and under his wings shalt thou trust"—"How often would I have gathered thee, as

a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; and ye would not!"—"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."

Observe a Divine agency—the *Lord led him*. The allusion is to the Jews; and the meaning is, that God conducted them in their journeyings to Canaan. They were very numerous; but the aggregate of them all was to him like an infant. "I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt." "He led them by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." "He led them about, he instructed them, he kept them as the apple of his eye."

See also the exclusive application of this work—"The Lord *alone* did lead him, and there was no strange god with him." The idols of the heathen were acknowledged to be limited in their powers. None of them could do every thing: there were therefore lords many, and gods many. There was a god for every exigency: a god for the sea—a god for the winds—a god for the field—a god for the garden—a god for marriage—and a god for war. But, said the Church, "Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he pleased." And he himself said, "O Israel! the Lord thy God is one Lord." *He* wrought out every deliverance for them. *He* conferred every blessing upon them—and, having done the work without any helper, he deserved all the praise; and assigns this as a reason why they should not divide their regards between him and any other. "I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots. Thou calledst in

trouble, and *I* delivered thee; *I* answered thee in the secret place of thunder: *I* proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; there shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god."

He is also a resemblance of the manner in which it was performed—"So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him." How? "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings."

All this is not to be confined to the Jews. There is also a spiritual Israel, whom they were intended to prefigure; the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. And such a people he now has for his Name: and he is leading them; leading them alone, without any one to divide with him the work, or share with him the glory. And how does he this? Let us not torture the image; but let us improve it. Three things are here ascribed to the mother eagle—not in providing for her young; for this is not the subject in question—but in educating them; in teaching them to fly. She stirreth up her nest. She fluttereth over her young. She spreadeth abroad her wings, and taketh them, and beareth them on her wings. And all this is applicable to God, in his dealings with us, and preparing us to seek those things that are above.

NOVEMBER 12.—EVENING.

‘As an eagle stirreth up her nest.’ DEUT. xxxii. 11.

—SHE sees the eaglets nestling, blinking, and dozing; and she wishes them to fly—Arise, says she—but they refuse—She then stirs up the nest, shakes it; turns out the inside; separates, scatters the parts. That is, she either destroys the nest, or makes it so uncomfortable that the young ones move out upon the neighbouring boughs, where they are in a posture for flight. God does the same with us—He stirs up our nest.

First. As to our outward condition in the world. This was the case with the Jews. Egypt had been their abode; where, in the infancy of their state, they were lodged like birds in a nest; and though it was an impure one, and much straitened and confined them, they evinced no care to leave it. And it is easy to see, that if they had been well treated, and enjoyed the smiles of the government and the former advantages of Goshen, Moses might have called long enough before they would have come out. But there arose another king, that knew not Joseph, who evil entreated them, and made their lives bitter by reason of cruel bondage. Their burdens were intolerable; their tasks impracticable: their complaints were turned into insults; their daughters were for slaves; and their sons for slaughter—and now they sigh for deliverance; and are willing to go forth, even into a wilderness, at the Divine call—Thus God stirred up their nest. Manasseh was the son of good Hezekiah: but every pious principle of his education had been corrupted by power, wealth, and pleasure. He

became proverbial for wickedness; and would have gone on till he had filled up the measure of his iniquity—But God stirred up his nest. “When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him, and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.” What brought the Prodigal to his senses, and made him think of home? A mighty famine in the land—he began to be in want. How many, now living, can say, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted: before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word”! *You* had health: but sickness invaded your frame; and you have been made to possess months of vanity, and have had wearisome nights appointed for you. *You* prospered in business: but your purposes were broken off; your schemes failed; you were put back in life, and compelled to begin the world afresh. *You* had a wife of your bosom: but the Lord took away the desire of your eyes with a stroke. *You* had a favourite child, on whom you placed many a flattering expectation; but at an early grave you sighed, “Thou destroyest the hope of man”—and now, at your meals, you see David’s seat is empty—and you often retire, and sigh, “Childhood and youth are vanity.” And what is all this but his stirring up your nest? and, by a sad, but salutary necessity, constraining you to turn from time to eternity? from the creature to Himself, the supreme Good? And what a mercy, if you can *now* say—

*"Now to the shining realms above
I stretch my hands and glance mine eyes :
Oh for the pinions of a dove,
To bear me to the upper skies !*

*"There, from the bosom of my God,
Oceans of endless pleasure roll :
There would I fix my last abode,
And drown the sorrows of the soul."*

Secondly. As to our self-righteous confidence and security. We have naturally a good opinion of ourselves; and the enemy of souls loves to cherish it. He therefore keeps his palace and his goods in peace. He dreads a stir in the conscience. He knows that we must be humbled before we are exalted; wounded before we can be healed; and be emptied of self, before we can be filled with all the fulness of God. This state of mind must therefore be disturbed and destroyed before any thing like genuine religion can commence. And what does God? By the conviction of sin, like a general at the head of an army, he enters the soul—and the man no more says, Peace, peace—his hopes are fled—he is reduced to self-despair—and his only cry is, "What must I do to be saved?" His worldly friends are alarmed for him: but they who know what is the way of the Spirit rejoice, not that he is made sorry, but that he now sorrows after a godly sort. And the subject of the change himself may mistake the nature and design of the operation; and conclude that he is going to be destroyed. But if the Lord had a mind to kill him, he would not have shewed him such things as these. Thus it was with Paul. See how his nest

was feathered with self-righteousness; and see how it was stirred up — “I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.”

Thirdly. As to our departure from life. We are not to remain here always; and it is no little difficulty to break up our attachment to the present state; and to make us willing to leave it. But see how this is done.—After a number of years we have a feeling ● persuasion that this is not our rest; that creatures are broken reeds; that the earth is a vale of tears; that the world is vanity and vexation of spirit; and having looked through every scene here, we wish for another and a nobler region of existence. Then, too, our powers begin to fail us. Pains and infirmities grow upon us. Our decaying senses shut us out by degrees from former objects and pursuits. The days are come wherein we have no pleasure. Hearing fails. They that look out of the window are darkened. Fear is in the way. The grasshopper is a burden. And when we look around, where now are the relations and friends that once rendered life delightful? Lover and friend God has put far from us, and our acquaintance into darkness. We seem more and better related to another world than this—We feel the drawings of those who are gone —“What have I here? and what do I here?”—And now the hope of usefulness ceases to detain us. How can I glorify God? or serve my generation? Why should I remain a cumberer of the ground, when so many fine and fruitful trees are cut down? And now we become better acquainted with the heavenly world we have more nearly approached—

O what darkness here! and what sunshine there!—
 What bondage here! and what liberty there!— There
 no law in the members warring against the law of
 the mind—There no complaint, when I would do
 good evil is present with me—Is not this worth dying
 for?—Then the earnest and foretastes of the glory
 to which we are going render every thing else com-
 paratively insipid; and the grapes of Eschcol make
 us long for the vineyards of Canaan—And thus the
 Lord stirs up the nest of life itself; and gets the heir
 of immortality upon the perch for his departure—
 where he is able to say,

“There is a house not made with hands,
 Eternal and on high;
 And here my spirit, waiting, stands
 Till God shall bid it fly.”

NOVEMBER 13.—MORNING.

“Fluttereth over her young.” DEUT. xxxii. 11.

—THIS she does to excite and teach them by her own example. And God does the same with regard to us. The eye does much more than the ear. The advantage derivable from example is universally allowed. It not only aids in the illustration of a subject, but also in the impression and influence of it; as it helps the memory, strikes the fancy, reproves indolence, encourages hope, and fires zeal. Wise teachers will therefore always teach as much as possible by example.

How sad is the state of those who are destitute of ~~this~~ advantage in religion! And there are those to be found who have scarcely an instance of godliness within their reach. We pity the son who has indeed a father who instructs him, and by his own example too—but it is to swear; to profane the Sabbath; to despise the house of God. We pity the daughter who has indeed a mother who leads her, and by her own example too—but it is to idolize her person; to read novels and romances—not the words of eternal life; to repair to places of dissipation—not to the throne of the heavenly grace. Is there an individual perusing this page, who is stationed in a neighbourhood, or a family, where he can find no one with whom he can unite in any religious exercise; who moves on alone; and even, perhaps, through reproach and opposition? Let him remember that this may not be the case always. If he walks in wisdom towards them that are without, his endeavours, in time, may be available; and his prayers be heard; and though he has been denied the advantage of *having* an example, he may have the honor of *becoming* one, and of leading others into the way everlasting.

But there are few places now in which there are not some instances of divine grace, sufficient to condemn the world, and to encourage those whose faces are Zion-ward. Some, perhaps, have many godly persons around them, and they see how superior these are to other men. How content! How grateful! How supported in trouble! How hopeful in death! Some have pious friends and relations. You have, perhaps, a sister, who often entreats you. Or a wife, who endeavours to win you. Or a father,

who says, My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. Or a mother who weeps over you and exclaims, What, my son! and the son of my womb! and the son of my vows! And what is all this but God teaching and exciting you? And if you can read, you have an additional advantage. How many excellent lives have been published! How many fine characters are portrayed in the Scriptures! And, by the perusal of all these, you bring a cloud of witnesses and examples before you. And when you see them in the exercise and display of whatsoever is lovely and of good report, do you not see God in all this, like the eagle, fluttering over her young?

But look at him in his more personal conduct. See how he not only teaches and excites by his word, but by his own example. Does he command us to be merciful? He is merciful; rich in mercy; he delighteth in mercy. Does he enjoin us to give? He daily loadeth us with his benefits. He gives us richly all things to enjoy. He spared not his own Son. Does he require us to forgive? He is ready to pardon. He abundantly pardons. "Love your enemies," says he; "bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This is not an optional thing with us; we *must* resemble him; and are only religious, in proportion as we are like him, and are one spirit with him.

To render his example the more engaging, we were going to say—he humanized it. God was manifest in the flesh. And this rendered his example, not only the more attractive, but even the more complete. For it is obvious that he could not have been our example, and have gone before us in the exercise of any of those graces, or the performance of any of those duties, which imply dependence, submission, and suffering, unless he had become incarnate. The Word, therefore, was made flesh, and dwelt among us. Divine goodness walked up and down the earth for three-and-thirty years, in human form. Here was visible the image of the invisible God. The sovereign comes down and goes before his subjects, to excite and allure them. See, says he; I obey, to teach you to obey—I suffer, to teach you how to suffer—I die, to make you fearless of death—"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour."

Let ministers learn from hence to be parental rather than magisterial; and to do more by influence than authority—"Neither as being lords over God's heritage; but being ensamples to the flock." This is what Paul enjoined on his son Timothy: "Be thou an example to the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." And what was his own practice? "As ye know how we exhorted and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children." "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not

the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."

And let parents remember this image. Do as well as teach. Be amiable. Render your religion inviting. Let your children *see* it. Come near them—attach them—draw them—

"And, as the bird each fond endearment tries,
To tempt her new-fledg'd offspring to the skies,
Employ each *art* ; reprove each dull delay ;
Allure to brighter worlds, and *lead* the way."

NOVEMBER 13.—EVENING.

"—Spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings."
DEUT. xxxii. 11.

THIS is to aid, and also to secure them. When they mount her back, they are little aware of her design; but she sails away with them—and sometimes, shakes them off. Then they must fly themselves—but she follows after—She hovers near them: and when their pinions flag, and they are unable to keep longer on the wing, with surprising speed and skill she darts and places herself underneath them; and thus receiving their whole weight, she prevents their fall, succours their weakness, and refreshes them for another flight. The Lord never entirely leaves his people—and it is well he does not: for without him they can do nothing. He does, however, in a degree withdraw from them, to make them more sensible of their weakness, and induce them to rely more upon himself: but not so as to hazard their safety—Thus the mother, when her infant is beginning to walk, is too venturesome, leaves him alone—not to go over a

plank across a river ; but in the room with her ; and upon the carpet ; where the fall will alarm and caution—not kill, or fracture him—And she soon takes him up, and presses him to her bosom and her lips again. God has himself (how much we need to teach and affect us!) employed another tender image. When young and feeble, the day perhaps warm, and the ground rough, the little lambs are unable to keep pace with the flock, and would be left panting and bleating behind : but the Shepherd of Israel gathers them with his arm, and carries them in his bosom.

Many are not convinced of their weakness, because they have never made, in earnest, a trial of their strength. But when a man begins to apply himself to the purposes of the divine life, he feels how unable he is to do any thing as of himself ; and he would never be induced to take one step, effectually, in a religious course, without such an assurance as the Gospel presents. Possibility, probability, is not enough : he must hear the voice that cries, “My grace is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” And he does hear this. And though much is required and expected of him, he sees all the means necessary to the end. He sees a cause more than adequate to the effect. It is a great thing to be a Christian : but “OUR SUFFICIENCY IS OF GOD.”

He has said, “I will strengthen them in the Lord ;” and, “As thy day, so shall thy strength be.” He aids them by his providence. And by communion with each other. And in the ordinances of religion. Ministers are “helpers of their joy.” His word quickens them. His statutes help them. In the holy assemblies, and at the table of their dying Lord, while they wait upon him, he renews their strength.

and they mount up with wings, as eagles; and they run and are not weary; and they walk, and are not faint. But all these are only the means—the Holy Spirit is the agent. Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord. Our dependence upon him is entire. We pray in the Spirit. We live in the Spirit. We walk in the Spirit. He leads us into all truth. He seals us unto the day of redemption. But for his influence, who would not every moment despond and sink?

But the eagle, by taking and bearing her young on her wings, not only sustains and supports them, but protects and secures them. Is an enemy in sight? she soars with them above his reach. Does the archer discharge his arrows from below? They must pierce through her body before they can touch them. "The path of life is above, to the wise, to depart from hell beneath." And God is the refuge, as well as the strength, of his people. And to each of them he says, what David said to Abiathar, when he fled to him from the slaughter of Saul—"Abide with me; fear not: for he that seeketh thy life, seeketh my life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard." When they can realize this, their soul dwells at ease. This is sometimes their privilege: it ought to be always their experience. Their security is always the same: but Paul was *persuaded* of it—"I am *persuaded*," said he, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

NOVEMBER 14.—MORNING.

"Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him."

JOB xxiii. 8, 9.

SOME have considered this allusively, and exemplified it thus—I go "forward;" forward to the promises. These abound in the Scriptures, are adapted to all our wants, and provide for a great while to come; and there was a time when I could claim them as my own, and plead them in prayer, and make them my songs in the house of my pilgrimage: now they seem only the property of others; and if they are not wells without water, they seem as springs shut up, and fountains sealed, to me—I go "forward but he is not there."—I go "backward;" backward to experience. I once thought that I had been convinced of sin, that I had trembled at his word, that I had rejoiced in his salvation, that my fellowship had been with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ: now my former views and feelings, my distresses and my comforts, and which I had supposed to be spiritual and Divine, appear suspicious, and I fear I have no part or lot in the matter; and that my heart has never been right in the sight of God—I go "backward, but I cannot perceive him." I turn to "the left hand, where he doth work," and survey the operations of nature. These are his inferior doings; but they are the produce of his wisdom, power, and goodness: and all his works praise him. And there was a time when, in the field, the meadow, the garden, I walked with God. I saw *his* sun rising upon

the evil and the good, and *his* rain coming down, and *his* paths dropping fatness. Every thing seemed full of God. Yea, I saw my Redeemer in the rose and in the lily, and said, As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons: now creation seems a kind of blank—"I cannot behold him."—I turn "to the right hand," among his nobler works of grace. I think of the glories of redemption, the operations of his Holy Spirit; I mingle with his people in the sanctuary, I repair to the table of my dying Lord—"But he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him."

Now all this is true in itself, and many a reader, perhaps, may be able to make it his own. But evangelical spiritualizers have not a little injured the Scripture, by giving it meanings which are not its own. What is true in doctrine, is not always true in the text, from which, by force or artifice, it is derived. A preacher is bound, however he may use it as an allusion or illustration, to inculcate the true and real import of every passage. Therefore we observe that Job here, by a fulness of phraseology, would express his ignorance and perplexity with regard to God's present dispositions and dispensations towards him: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him."

God may withdraw from his people; not indeed entirely. This would be inconsistent with his engagements; and were he *thus* to depart from them they would relapse into a state of nature, and sin have again dominion: but he may so withdraw him-

self as to elude their views and apprehensions. He may conceal from them the manifestations of his special favour; they may not see his smiles as before: he may seem to be an enemy, while yet he is their best friend: like Joseph, who made himself strange, and behaved himself roughly to his brethren, to humble them, and bring their sin to remembrance, while his bowels yearned within him, and he sought where to weep. And this applies much to his providential dealings with them: these are frequently so trying and mysterious, that they are unable to find out his meaning and design. He even derives a character from hence; "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." And when we consider the vastness of his understanding, and the littleness of our own, is it wonderful that in many of his proceedings he should be far above out of our sight? and that, requiring us to trust him, instead of tracing him, he should often say, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter"? We now see only the beginnings, not the end; we only see parts, not the whole; and of these parts we see not the relations and the bearings; and the little we do see we see through crevices and in fogs.

We may however remark, that much of the difficulty of Providence results from our selfish and worldly feelings. We do not think Providence mysterious when we have all things, and abound. We never heard Christians expressing surprise or perplexity when they had ease, and health, and business, and agreeable connexions—all is plain enough then; but as soon as the scene changes, and trials

befall them, "his way is in the sea, and his path in the deep waters, and his footsteps are not known!" Yea, they do not think the conduct of God so incomprehensible, when losses and afflictions befall others. They can go to them, and say, All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth; he hath done all things well; as many as he loves he rebukes and chastens— But when these good talkers about afflictions become the subjects of them, how frequently do they draw upon themselves the remark, "Thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest: it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled."

Many things too would no longer remain incomprehensible or *unaccountable*, if persons were willing to censure themselves; for the things which *confound* them are only the natural consequences of their own misconduct. "The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord." If persons eat freely, and lie late in bed, and take no exercise, ask a physician what right they have to complain of low spirits and ill health. If God, who knoweth our frame, has forbidden the widow to marry unless in the Lord, and, disregarding his judgment, she yokes herself to an unbeliever, and is deprived of her religious freedom: if he has assured us that to walk surely is to walk uprightly, and by fleshly wisdom we have our conversation in the world: if he commands us to cease from man, and we will make flesh our arm:—Why should we wonder at the results which he foresaw and foretold?

Having sown tares, why should we think it strange that we do not reap wheat? or marvel that we cannot gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? All would be as plain as the day, were we to say, "I have erred."

We frequently expect too much from Providence. We wish it to act preternaturally, instead of conforming to established laws and rules. We seem to rely upon it not only to assist us in our difficulties, but to countenance us in our mistakes; to free us from responsibility when we act freely; and to afford us impunity in imprudence. But if he places us in the way, and clearly directs our goings, and tells us to look straight on, and to ponder our steps; and we close our eyes in raptures, or fix them among the stars in speculation; Is God's providence to be accused because an angel does not come to keep us from striking against a stumblingblock, or falling into the ditch? And are we to lie bruised, or bemired, complaining that clouds and darkness are round about *Him*—instead of crying, "I have sinned; what shall be done unto thee, O thou Preserver of men?"

But see the temper of Job while in this trying condition. He is restless; he is after God in every direction—No quarter is unexplored: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." The righteous are "the generation of them that seek him." But they do *not* seek him whose "strength is to sit still." *Their* wishes are "the desire of the slothful, which killeth him, because his hands refuse

to labour." Our disposition is to be judged of by our exertions and our sacrifices. A good man may be at a loss for God, but he cannot be satisfied without him. He loves him, he needs him, he has tasted that he is gracious; and therefore when God hides his face from him he is troubled. For he is always enjoying God, or searching after him. The latter is as much a proof of grace as the former: yea, many who are now holding communion with him have less powerful desires than some who are lamenting after him.

NOVEMBER 14.—EVENING.

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord." PSALM lv. 22.

ALL men are not exercised in the same way; but every one has something trying and oppressive in his condition that may be called *his* burden. And we may make one remark concerning this universal experience—We are commonly prone to reduce the burdens of others, but to magnify our own. Each sufferer is ready to say, "Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow." But this is the language of ignorance as well as of self-importance. How little do we know what thousands of our fellow-creatures endure! Indeed no one can judge perfectly concerning the burden of another. For the whole of that burden, which may seem inconsiderable to you, is never known, and often a small part of it only appears. The weight too is relative: a burden which a strong man can carry would crush an infant or an invalid. It may be also increased by imagination; in which case, though there may be only fancy

in the fact, there is reality enough in the feeling—
“The heart only knoweth his own bitterness.”

But if all are not equally unhappy, all have somewhat that bears upon the mind: “Full bliss is bliss Divine.” And if the question was addressed to a number of persons individually, What is *thy* burden? One would answer, My burden is made up of care and anxiety. An event is before me that perplexes me by day, and holds my eyes waking by night. It is a movement in life. I know how much depends on a wrong step, and I wish to be found in the path of duty: but when I would determine, I seem equally poised by claims and difficulties on either side, and I know not the way I should take.—Another would say, My burden is made up of malignity and calumny. I wish not only to approve myself unto God, but to stand fair with my fellow-men: yet they misrepresent my motives, and vilify my actions, and cast out my name as evil—And if all manner of evil is spoken of you falsely, it is the very thing your Saviour told you to look for; and the same affliction has befallen your brethren who were before you in the world. Yet we wonder not that you feel. The Apostle throws in “cruel mockings” among the severest sufferings of martyrdom; and the Saviour said, “Reproach hath broken my heart.”—A third says, My burden is outward trouble; disappointments, losses, and embarrassments in my worldly substance and circumstances. My purposes are broken off, my schemes and dependences have failed,

“ And, day by day, some current's thwarting force
Sets me more distant from a prosperous course ”—

I wish to provide things honest in the sight of all men; but, with growing demands, I have diminished resources, and often look at the state of my family, and ask, "What shall they eat, and what shall they drink, and wherewithal shall they be clothed?"—A fourth says, My burden is bereavement. How have I been stripped and peeled! I had a child, I had a parent, I had a friend who was as my own soul, I had a companion with whom I took sweet counsel. Now I sit alone, and am as a sparrow upon the house-top. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.—Another says, My complaint is bodily indisposition; disease threatens me, infirmity weakens me, shattered nerves and broken spirits often deprive me of the privileges of the sanctuary, and discolour, as the medium, all my views even of Divine things.—Another says, My age is labour and sorrow. The days are come of failing eyes, and ears dull of hearing, and trembling limbs: fears are in the way; the grasshopper is a burden; and desire fails.

"My vitals, with laborious strife,
Bear up the crazy load;
And drag the dull remains of life
Along the tiresome road."

Another says, I could bear every thing else if all was clear, and calm, and inviting, at the end—But there is death—at the sight of which my peace flies, and my comforts are embittered. Oh how shall I ever meet the king of terrors! Ye departed saints! you have passed the event: death is behind you; but it is before me, and it is ever before me. I hear some talk of their departure with confidence and joy; but

I am always subject to bondage through fear of death—

Well, I want not to hear what constitutes thy particular burden—Be it what it may, "Cast," says David, "thy burden upon the Lord"—Not upon creatures, not upon good men, not upon ministers. It is true, in a sense, we are all to be burden-bearers: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." And "a friend is born for adversity." But when wanted he is not always to be found. And he may not enter into your views and feelings. And if his sympathy be kind, it may not be efficient. He may pity, but be unable to relieve. Men at their best estate are nothing without God. Cease, therefore, from them; and say, with the Church, "Therefore will I look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me."

"But how can I cast my burden upon the Lord?" By faith. When you believe that he can be found, that he is near, that he is a very present help in trouble, that the very hairs of your head are all numbered, that all your ways are before him, that he is pacified towards you by the blood of the Cross, that he who spared not his own Son will also freely give you all things, that he invites you to come and put your trust under the shadow of his wings, that he careth for you, and will make all things work together for your good; then the spirit is freed, relieved, composed; and the promise is accomplished—"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon thee, because he trusteth in thee." It is also done by prayer: "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established." "Be careful for nothing; but

in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Prayer is therefore not only a duty, but a privilege. It is good for us to draw near to God. It not only relieves us by diverting our sorrow, but by soothing and reducing it. Prayer opens the heart, and lets out grief; and opens heaven, and lets down grace. It succours us not only by its exercise, but by its success. God answers prayer by acting for us and in us. To deny this is to explain away the constant and express language of the Scripture—But we must enter into the spirit of prayer. If we pray carelessly and formally, the burden will remain still pressing us down. Hannah was full of anguish, and prayed: but "she prayed in her heart." And what was the result? "When she had poured out her soul before the Lord, she went her way, and did eat and drink, and her countenance was no more sad."

Some have not yet found their way to this relief in their trouble; but the Church says, "A glorious high throne from the beginning has been the place of our sanctuary"—

"And who that knows the worth of prayer
But wishes to be often there?"

NOVEMBER 15.—MORNING.

"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." JOHN vi. 53.

THIS language gave great offence when our Lord delivered it. Many of his disciples said, "It is a hard

saying, who can hear it?" We need not wonder therefore if it should be disrelished by some now. It certainly requires explanation, for it has given rise to several abuses or mistakes. We may remark two of these. The first takes it in a sense too gross. It is the doctrine of transubstantiation, which has rolled down from age to age in blood. According to this, it is believed that the words, "This is my body; and this is my blood," do not mean emblems of them, but the things themselves; and that, as soon as the bread and the wine have been consecrated by the priest, they are changed into the very body and blood of Christ, and that he is thus eaten, and may be eaten by thousands at the same time! In the same way they may as easily prove that he consists of boards and nails; for he says, "I am the door." What a strong delusion to believe a lie is here! Be it observed, our Lord has here no reference at all to the Sacrament, for this was not instituted till long after. Besides, the participation of his flesh and blood, of which he speaks, is inseparable from salvation—"Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." But are all saved who partake of the Lord's Supper? And do all perish who never received it? The second takes it in a manner too refined, and is derived from the enemies of evangelical truth, who have always shewn a peculiar aversion to the death of Christ under any other notion than that of an example or witness. They tell us, the diction is very strong, and must be much qualified. Our Lord, say they, is here speaking of himself as a teacher, and refers to the design of his doctrine; for knowledge has always been considered as the food of the mind. This is

readily allowed. Yet what teacher ever said to his pupils, You must eat, not my instructions, but myself; not my lessons, but my flesh and blood! The language is certainly very metaphorical; but it is founded in truth, and designed to convey an important reality. The thing is, we live not by the life of things, but by their death. It is so with vegetables, and birds, and fishes, and beasts; they serve to nourish us by their death. We live spiritually by the dying of the Lord Jesus: and the allusion refers to his mediatorial offering for our sins; and teaches us, that faith is necessary to our deriving benefit from his sacrifice—"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."

For this eating and drinking represent our believing on Christ. The resemblance between these and the exercise of faith appears in four things. There is in each of them *appetite*. Our Saviour speaks of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Hunger and thirst are natural, powerful, returning appetites. Such are the desires which all believers feel towards the Lord Jesus. There is in each of them *application*. A man may hear of food, see it, hold it in his hand, present it to his lips; but this is not eating. In eating there is an actual reception of the food into the animal system. And in believing we receive Christ Jesus the Lord. His suitableness and all-sufficiency to our case are made known in the Gospel, and all the blessings of his salvation are brought nigh; but still we perish unless we are made partakers of Christ. How often does the old and good divinity tell us, that an unapplied Saviour is a nonentity to us! In each case there is *satisfaction*. Medicine may be necessary, but we are not

said to eat medicine—we take medicine; but we eat meat because there is pleasure in it. Food is essential to our subsistence; yet when we sit down to a well-spread table, we never perform it as a duty to save us from death—There is immediate gratification in the action, and this secures the performance. The reception of Christ is not only indispensable, but free and delightful. Like Zaccheus, we receive him joyfully. We not only submit to the method of his grace, but we acquiesce, we glory in it. We love his salvation. We rejoice in his Name. In each there is *nourishment*. This is the design and effect of food. It is thus the child grows: it is thus the man is sustained, and rendered equal to his labour. And “the just shall live by faith.” “The life that I live in the flesh,” says Paul, “I live by the faith of the Son of God.”

Every image applied to the Redeemer fails to do him justice. We say, there is no subsisting without food; yet Moses and Elijah lived forty days and forty nights without eating. But to live for a moment spiritually, without Christ, is a miracle that never has been, and never can be accomplished. Food, though necessary to life, is not sufficient to preserve it. This was the case even with what is called “angels’ food,” and “meat from heaven.” “Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” Blessed Jesus! thy flesh is meat indeed, and thy blood is drink indeed! Evermore give us this food.

NOVEMBER 15.—EVENING.

"Nevertheless let us go unto Him." JOHN xi. 15.

HE is never too confident in his resources, nor too late in his movements. We are often mistaken with regard to our wishes and designs. We raise expectations which we cannot realize; and begin enterprises which we are unable to finish. Among men some are strong and some are weak; but the difference between them is only comparative. The one may break a larger rod than another; but when you bring them to the mast of a ship they are perfectly upon a level. But he who speaks in righteousness is mighty to save—"He is able to save unto the uttermost." Therefore he says—

"Nevertheless, let us go unto him"—Not to *them*, but to *him*—Not to the sisters, but to the brother—Not to Martha and Mary, but to Lazarus. "To what purpose? Lazarus is dead. It is now too late." It would be too late for you; but not for me. Your extremity is my opportunity. I turn the shadow of death into the morning, and can do more than you are able to ask or think. I surprise as well as succour; and love to arrive at the place of difficulty when creatures are all withdrawn, having said, Help is not in us.

"Nevertheless, let us go unto him"—"But he is not only dead, but buried; and has lain in the grave four days." Can the dead praise thee? Can they who go down into the pit hope for thy truth?—What! visit a corpse in a state of putrefaction?—He cannot receive thee, see thee, hear thee. But he can

hear, and see, and receive *me*. Let us try what an interview will produce between death and the grave, and the resurrection and the life.

And did he go in vain? We can visit the "long home" of a friend. We can go to the grave to weep there; but were we to attempt to open an intercourse with the inhabitant, we should be laughed to scorn. But Jesus said, *Lazarus, come forth*; and in a moment his lungs heaved, his blood liquefied and flowed again, and he came forth in newness of life! What a journey, what a character was here! Had you met him in his way to Bethany, you would, in appearance, only have seen a man like ourselves. But had one of the disciples stepped back, as soon as he had passed, and said, *There is Jesus of Nazareth; he is going to visit a man in his tomb; and could he have informed you of the result, would you not have followed him?* Wherever I see him going I will go with him. The journey will be for his honour and my profit—He cannot move in vain—Nothing is too hard for the Lord. When the Egyptians were pressing upon them, and the Red Sea was before them, he said, "*Go forward.*" What, into the deep? Yes, into the deep. To be drowned? No, but to go through dry-shod. They were to obey: he was to open the passage. In the first creation "*he spake, and it was done.*" And in the second, "*he calleth things that are not as though they were.*"

Let us never despond, but trust in him. Let his all-sufficiency encourage us with regard to others. Let those who in doing good meet with unlikely materials to work upon; let ministers who seem only preaching many of their hearers into impenitence; let parents, whose hearts are bleeding over ungodly

children, think of him who was taking this seemingly useless journey, and never abandon their endeavours or hope. Let them use means in *his* name; and by faith and prayer bring *him* forward—He can make these dry bones live—The Son quickeneth whom he will.

And let it encourage us with regard to ourselves. Am I a sinner? I ought to feel that my case is bad; but it is not desperate. Hopeless indeed it is as to myself and all creatures; but in him is my help found. He can say to the prisoners, Go forth. He can make the blind to see, and the deaf to hear—He can make all things new. Am I a Christian? Let me bring my confidence in every exigency and difficulty, to his power, and say, with Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." "Yea, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us."

But, says one, "My wound is incurable—He will not go to the grave of my departed hope." If he keeps away, it is not because he is unable to re-animate thy dead, and give back the dear treasure to thine arms: but because his power is under the direction of his wisdom; yea, and of his righteousness and kindness too. But the truth is, that he will visit the interesting spot—Thy brother, thy mother, thy child, shall rise again. The period is coming when he will look down and say to his mighty angels, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep."—And, lo! he descends, and the dead arise, and you embrace to part no more. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

NOVEMBER 16.—MORNING.

"Thy hidden ones" Ps. lxxxiii. 3.

THIS representation of God's people is worthy our notice. It may be taken two ways.

First. As referring to their safety. We often hide only to preserve. This is the meaning of the word in the parable, with regard to the discovery of the treasure in the field; "which, when a man hath found, he hideth it." His aim is not to conceal, but to secure; and the cause is put for the effect. Thus God's people are hidden. He hid Noah in the Ark, and the waters that drowned the world could not *find* him. When his judgments were coming over the land, "Come, my people," said he, "enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thee also for a little season, until the indignation be overpast." Hence the promise, "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." Hence the confidence expressed by David, "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me upon a rock." The Saviour could say, "In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me." And, "All the saints are in his hand." They are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.—For He himself is their "refuge;" their "hiding-place"—They are his "hidden ones."

Secondly. As intimating their concealment. This is not absolute. But it holds in various respects and degrees. It is true with regard to the nature of their

spiritual life. Our life, says the Apostle, is hid with Christ in God; and that he refers to its invisibleness, rather than to its safety, is obvious from the words following: "When he who is our life shall *appear*, we also shall *appear* with him in glory." The source, principles, and actings of this life are unintelligible to natural men; neither can they know them, because they are spiritually discerned. The heart of the believer only knows his own bitterness; and a stranger intermeddleth not with his joy. The manna upon which he feeds is hidden manna. And no one knoweth the new name in the white stone given him, but the receiver. His grief is too deep to be noisy. He sitteth alone and keeps silence. The stricken deer leaves the herd. Other warriors appeal to their senses, and get fame; but his conflicts are carried on within, visible to God only; and his laurels are all future. Others may give alms, to be seen of men: but his left hand is not to know what his right hand doeth.

They are sometimes hidden by persecution. For though this does not prevent their being Christians, it hinders them from appearing as such; especially by secluding them from their social and public assemblies. This is not our case. Our teachers are not put into a corner. We can go to the house of God in company. We can feed in the ways; and our pasture is in all high places. But call to remembrance the former times, when they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and dens, and caves of the earth; or were confined in prisons; or prayed and preached under the cover of night. But they were dear to God; they were *his* hidden ones.

They are sometimes hidden by the obscurity of their stations. Not many of the wise, and mighty,

and noble are called: but when they *are* called, they are also *exhibited*. They are like cities set on hills, which cannot be hid. A little religion in high life goes a great way, and is much talked of, because it is so often a strange thing. But God hath chosen the poor of this world; and they are often rich in faith. Yet how is their moral wealth to be known? How few opportunities have they for religious display or exertion! There may be the principle of benevolence, where there is no ability to give. And the Lord seeth the heart; but men can only judge from actions. Many who are great in the sight of the Lord are living in cottages and hovels; and are scarcely known, unless to a few neighbours equally obscure.

They are sometimes hidden by their disposition. They are reserved; and shrink back from notice. They are timid and self-diffident. This restrains them in religious conversation, especially as it regards their own experience. This keeps them from making a profession of religion, and joining a Christian church. Joseph of Arimathæa was a disciple of Jesus; but secretly, for fear of the Jews. And Nicodemus, from the same cause, came to Jesus by night. They had difficulties in their situations, from which others were free. They ought to have overcome them; and so they did at last: but it was a day of small things with them at first. Others are circumstanced and tried in a similar way; and we must be patient toward all men.

They are sometimes hidden by their infirmities. We would not plead for sin; but grace may be found along with many imperfections. The possessors have what is essential to religion in them; but not every-

thing that is ornamental, and lovely, and of good report.

The same also will apply to errors. Here, again, we are far from undervaluing divine truth. It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace. But it is impossible for us to say how much ignorance, and how many mistakes, may be found, even in the Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile. How little did Peter know of the most important of all subjects, when our Saviour pronounced him blessed; and said he was a partaker of divine illumination! We extend this even to congregations and communities. There may be individuals in them, wiser than their teachers, and no strangers to communion with the God of all grace. Who can entertain too bad an opinion of Popery? Yet we find a Nicol, a Pascal, a Fenelon, in that most corrupt church—Where may not God have his hidden ones? Let us not judge of the real number of his people, by things that do appear. While we ought to pray always—"The Lord add to his people, how many soever they be, a hundred fold." It is not only candour, but truth, that tells us we may enlarge our hopes: while we ought to pray always. "Wot ye not what the Scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal."

NOVEMBER 16.—EVENING.

"For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." HEB. ii. 18.

THERE can be no question of whom these words are spoken. Let my thoughts commune with him as the sufferer and the succourer.

He himself suffered, being *tempted*. Then a man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. In this sense the Lord Jesus was not tempted, neither indeed could be, for he "was the holy One of God." We are tempted when we are solicited to sin. Hence Satan is called the tempter; and thus by him our Saviour was tempted to unbelief, presumption, and idolatry. But the word temptation does not always or principally in the Scripture signify attempts to draw into sin. God is said to tempt Abraham: and we read that we are to count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations; and that, if needs be, we are in heaviness through manifold temptations. Here, and in many other places, the word means afflictions. These are called temptations, because they are designed and adapted to try us—to prove our principles and dispositions—to convince the reality and the degree of our grace to ourselves and others. His being tempted, therefore, means his being subject to all the distress, pain, and anguish, which characterized him a man of sorrows, and justified his saying, Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

But he *suffered*, being tempted. This attests the impression made upon him by what he endured; and

shews us two things—That his divinity did not absorb his human nature, so as to render it incapable of passion; and—That, as man, his patience was not a physical apathy, or a philosophical insensibility. There is no patience in bearing what we do not feel; and no resignation in giving up what we do not love and value—as there would be no virtue in fasting if we had no appetite to food. Our Lord, instead of being less susceptible of suffering than others, was more so. That which adds to the impression of pain is, the delicate and fine crasis and constitution of the part aggrieved. The composition of our Saviour's body perfectly fitted it to receive the most quick and sensible touches of every object. And the same may be said of his mind. A being dull and stupid feels much less suffering than a man of lively conception and reflection: in the one case, pain falls upon a log of wood; in the other, upon the apple of the eye. Jesus groaned in spirit; wept; made supplications with strong cryings and tears; was sore amazed, and very heavy; his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood, falling to the ground—But the sufferer

Is also the *succourer*. The one is the consequence of the other. "For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." This ability therefore is relative and acquired. He was made perfect through suffering; and in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted, by way of atonement, by way of example, by way of sympathy, by way of efficiency. Able,

By way of atonement. And is it a light thing to know, in our deepest sufferings, that we are enduring nothing that is penal? That Christ hath redeemed

us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us? That every affliction is only the stroke of a fatherly rod, chastising us for our profit? That we are accepted in the Beloved? That we can never come into condemnation? Able,

By way of example. We are naturally like bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke; and, even after some degrees of religious experience, we know little of the holy art of "suffering affliction, and of patience." But Jesus "suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." And as in him we see what disposition we should exercise towards men, who are the instruments of our distress, so we learn also how we are to submit to God, who is the author of it: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me—nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." One thing is of great importance here. In his conduct we see that we are never to go aside either to *meet* or—to *miss* our cross; but when we find it in our way, to take it up, and follow him. Able,

By way of sympathy. We may compassionate a sufferer, but we cannot properly sympathize with him, unless we have been through the same. Now he was in all things made like unto his brethren; and he remembers how he felt, and what he desired and required when in our condition. He knows the poverty of his people much better than by report: he was poor. He knows the effect of slander: "reproach," he says, "hath broken my heart."

"He knows what sore temptations mean,
For he has felt the same."

He knows what it is to die, and to enter the darkness of the grave. Able,

By way of efficiency. Pity is not power. Many can sympathize with their connexions who have not the means of relief and redress. The ear is not heavy, that it cannot hear; yet the hand is shortened, that it cannot save. But he is mighty to save. He is able to save unto the uttermost. He can always support, deliver, sanctify. He can turn the shadow of death into the morning. He can turn the curse into a blessing. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. But this efficiency is the consequence of his suffering—"for the suffering of death—he is crowned with glory and honour"—all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth.

Well may he be called "the consolation of Israel!" Let us say of him as Lamech did of Noah, "This same shall comfort us."

Let us also be concerned to resemble him. Let us be tenderhearted, and concerned to comfort them that are cast down. We cannot do much; but let us do what we can; and be little images of him who is the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, and as rivers of water in a dry place. What is most admirable in us is, not our wealth, or splendour, or even talents, but those feelings which render us pitiful and courteous; humane and *divine*. And these sentiments are best learned in the school of affliction. This is one of the motives that should reconcile us to our trials. We are not detached and unrelated individuals, but parts of a whole whose welfare should be dear to us—and in that we suffer, being tempted, we are able to succour them that are tempted.

NOVEMBER 17.—MORNING.

"His seed shall endure for ever." Ps. lxxxix. 36.

DAVID was peculiarly related to the Messiah. He wrote much concerning him. He yielded the most varied and complete type of him ever exhibited. He was at once his Lord and his Son. Hence the name of the former is often applied to the latter; and what is spoken of the one, is often to be extended to the other. It *must* be so applied, to do anything like justice to the force of the language. And in this case we are more than justified, by numerous appropriations of men in the New Testament, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Upon this principle, the words before us insure the perpetuation of his people—"His seed shall endure for ever." We shall say nothing of their number: though, if we were asked the question, "Are there few that shall be saved?" we could boldly answer, No! Ignorance and bigotry have always diminished them; but they shall be found, when gathered together, a countless multitude.

But why are they called his *seed*? Because they derive their being, as new creatures, from him "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of him. In such a relation we look for resemblance. This, indeed, is not invariably the case, with regard to children. Some of them have little of the father's likeness, either in features or in temper. But all Christians resemble Christ. They bear the image of the heavenly. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. The relation infers duty. It does away, indeed, with all servileness; but not with ser

vice. "A seed shall serve him." "And I will spare them," says he, "as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." "A son honoureth his father." Every Christian, therefore, will ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The relation confers honour. His seed are descended from One who is higher than the kings of the earth; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and whose holiness and goodness are infinite. Such honour have all his saints.

But what a privilege does it bespeak! There is an amazing instinct in brute-creatures towards their offspring. It seems to transform the very nature of some of them. The timid sheep, and the fearful bird, become bold and daring on behalf of their young. As to man, if *he* were not to provide for his own, he would be condemned by all around him; and were he a pretender to religion, he would be considered as denying the faith, and be deemed worse than an infidel. Will the Lord Jesus neglect *his* offspring? Will he suffer them to want any good thing? Will he not educate them? Chastise them? Resent every injury that is done them? Acknowledge them? Defend them?

Observe, not only their relation to him, but their perpetuity—"They shall endure for ever." They die as well as others: they often die earlier: yet, consistently with this obvious and undeniable fact, they shall continue for ever in three senses. First. In the succession of their race to the end of the world. It will never be cut off—"The Church in danger!" *What* Church? "Upon this rock," says he, "I will build *my* Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Yea, his people shall continue to

increase in number and excellency—*We* shall leave the world better than we entered it; and so will our *children*—till Jerusalem shall be established, and be made a praise in the whole earth.—Secondly. In their religious character to the end of their own life. If left to themselves, we could not be sure of their persevering to the end of a day or an hour. But they are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation. He upholdeth them with his hand. They shall hold on their way. In all their dangers they shall be more than conquerors.—Thirdly. In their glorified state, through eternal ages. The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. All other greatness is only for life: it is frequently less durable—at death it *ends*. But *then*, the Christian's greatness—I will not say, begins; for it began the moment he prayed—but then it continues—increases—and is perfected. Death only affects one part of him: the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness. And even the body shall be revived and improved—and made like the Saviour's own glorious body—and be as immortal as the soul. Every thing here is variable, fading, perishing—

“All, all on earth is shadow; all beyond
Is substance—the reverse is Folly's creed—
How solid all, where change shall be no more!”

—Where we shall have, not only endless existence, but endless existence beatified. Where, if we have treasure, moth and rust will not corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. Where, if we have a house, it will not be a house made with hands, but eternal in the heavens. Where, if we have a crown of glory, it

fadeth not away. Where, if we have friendships, we shall part no more. Where we shall be **FOR EVER WITH THE LORD.**

NOVEMBER 17.—EVENING.

"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." **MATT. X. 32.**

LET us see what this promise requires of us in a way of DUTY. It is confession: "*Whosoever confesseth me before men.*" Three inquiries will serve to explain it.

First—*Who* is to be confessed? "*He that confesseth me,*" says the Saviour. Him therefore we are to confess in his being, person, character, offices, relations; in his sufferings and glory; in his cause, ministers, and members; in every thing that concerns him as he is revealed to us in the Scripture. Only it is necessary to observe, that as the opposition to him is often varying, so the duty of his confessors will vary accordingly; and the truth we are peculiarly required to witness must be determined by the nature and exigency of the call. The Apostle speaks of being "*established in the present truth;*" by which we are to understand some doctrine particularly opposed or neglected, and the confirmation and recommendation of which is more immediately called for. According, therefore, to the seasons and places in which we live, we shall have to testify sometimes in favour of his divinity and attonement, sometimes against self-righteousness, sometimes against superstition, sometimes against enthusiasm and fanaticism, sometimes against Antinomianism, and often, very often, against a mere

form of knowledge or godliness, without the power thereof.

Secondly—*Before* whom are we to confess him? “He that confesseth me *before men*.” What men? Godly men only? It is an easy thing to confess him before his admirers—But we are to confess him before bad men, before his enemies as well as friends. Before the poor and the vulgar only, by whom we are little influenced? Nay: but before the rich, the great—“I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.” Before the ignorant and illiterate only? No: but before the sons of learning and of science, who may pity or ridicule our want of understanding. Before those only who know us, and who would despise us for denying what we profess? No: but before those who are strangers to us, and cannot be aware of our inconsistency.

Thirdly—*How* are we to confess him before men? The source of the confession is faith; as it is written, “I believed, therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak.” If our testimony does not harmonize with our convictions and sentiments, it is worse than nothing, it is hypocrisy and lies. But though the spring be within, the stream is without; though the one is invisible, the other is to be seen. There are three ways in which our confession of him is to be made.

Verbally. Thus the martyrs confessed him; for they would not have suffered, had they hid his righteousness within their heart. When Peter and John were forbidden by the council to speak any more in his Name, they answered, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” We are to glorify God in our body as well as in our spirit. He

has given us speech, not as many use it, but to honour the giver; and with David we should pray, "Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise." We could not be satisfied with the heart of a friend if his tongue was always engaged against us, or indeed if it was never employed for us. Yea, we should say, the thing is impossible; if we had his heart, we should have his tongue: "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Here, however, be it observed, that we are not to rush into every company like an armed soldier, or to draw the sword of the Spirit upon every one we meet. We are not bound to exasperate or to rebuke, when it will call forth more profaneness or obscenity. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." "A word," says Solomon, "fitly spoken, how good is it! it is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." There is a zeal which is not according to knowledge; and wisdom is profitable to direct. Yet we may err on the side of deficiency as well as excess; and while we shun imprudence, we may be restrained, by a cowardly fear or shame, from seizing opportunities that present themselves of speaking usefully, without the violation of any duty or decorum in life. How many of these have we suffered to pass unimproved! "Lord," would Usher often say, "Lord, forgive my sins of omission."

Practically. Confession may be attached to conduct as well as to language: yea, actions, it is proverbially said, speak louder than words. A minister has two individuals belonging to his congregation. The one says little of him, and less to him; but he is con-

stant in his attendance, and bends everything to enable him to enjoy what he deems a privilege as well as a duty. The other always extols him much, both before his face and behind his back; but he is seldom in his place, and suffers the most trifling excuses to keep him from what he *so* admires! Does not the practice of the former decide more than the commendations of the latter? We read of those who profess that they know God, but in works deny him; and of the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie. Many, like Ezekiel's hearers, with their mouth shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness: many, like Judas, even while they kiss, betray. We are required to hold forth the word of life, not only by our tongues, but tempers; not only by our lips, but lives. When we exemplify the holiness and excellency of the Gospel by our deportment in every condition, and especially when we fully discharge every relative duty, then it is that we adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and commend his religion to others.

Passively. "They also serve that wait;" and they also confess that endure. When his followers are willing to sustain the loss of all things rather than forsake him, and instead of complaining, rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer for his Name, they evince the strength and force of their attachment to him, and he is glorified in them. Persons may be exercised with many afflictions who are not called to endure persecution. It is peculiarly as sufferers that many are the Lord's witnesses; and how do they glorify him in the fires, when in patience they possess their souls, and can even rejoice in tribulation also! What a testimony do they bear to the power

of his grace and the comforts of the Holy Ghost, when they shew that he sustains them when every earthly support gives way; and refreshes and delights them when all creature consolation is dried up or embittered! The passive graces are with more difficulty exercised than the active. The active fall in with several principles of our nature, especially our love of activity and notice: but to sit alone and keep silence; to suffer on week after week, and month after month, unobserved, unless by partial friendship: mourning indeed, but not murmuring; every word, every feeling, softly confessing, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me: let thy lovingkindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant:"—when I have turned away from such a scene as this, I have said within myself, I have often heard of religion, but I have now seen it: and I have been ready to invite others to return with me, exclaiming,

"Behold the awful portrait, and admire:
Nor stop at wonder; imitate and live."

NOVEMBER 18.—MORNING.

"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." MATT. X. 32.

LET us see what this promise insures in a way of PRIVILEGE. It is confession: "him will I *confess* before my Father which is in heaven." The word signifies more than mere attestation: it means ac-

knowledge with approbation and applause. This would seem incredible, did we not know that the reward is not founded in our worthiness, but is designed to display the exceeding riches of his grace. The Lord thinks better of their works than they ever do: they often blush and weep over their performances; but he will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Nothing is more pleasing than praise; and nothing is more stimulating. The desire of it is generally connected with some of the finest sensibilities of our nature. He who is dead to it betrays a mind destined to no distinction, and on which no great or good impression is likely to be made. But observe three things which enhance the privilege here spoken of.

The First is the applauder: "*I will confess him.*" In all praise much depends upon the person from whom it is derived. A real proficient therefore in any art studies to approve himself to such as are masters of it. To their judgment he appeals, and their approbation supports and gratifies him under the neglect or the censure of the rude and incompetent. The praise of some is worse than reproach. Our Lord forbade the devils to confess him. Paul was displeased with the spirit of divination in the damsel that cried, "These are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto men the way of salvation." Wise men lay little stress upon the caresses of the multitude; who are easily wrought upon, and are led by humour rather than conviction, and can seldom comprehend what they pronounce upon. And therefore a heathen philosopher when shouted home to his door by the populace,

turned round, and said, "What folly or harm have I done; to deserve and obtain *your* commendations?" Some hearers are afraid to say a word of praise to a minister, lest they should make him proud and vain. But the danger is imaginary: he has no opinion of their judgment. Praise is debased, and becomes more than worthless by insincerity: it is then flattery, and "he that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet." All the friendship of the world is only "lies in hypocrisy." Human applause can add little to our welfare and happiness. The influence of it is confined to time: what can it do for us when sickness spreads a gloom over our comforts, and mortality draws the curtain upon all that is valued on earth? Paul therefore says, "It is a light thing to be judged of man's judgment: he that judgeth me is the Lord." He knows all things; he reads the heart; he is truth itself; *he* is approved whom the *Lord* commendeth. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in *thy* sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer!"

The Second is, In whose presence he will acknowledge us: "I will confess him before *my Father which is in heaven.*" Could you choose before whom you would be owned and praised, it would doubtless be one you most highly esteemed, in whose regard you placed your happiness, and who was most able to advance and secure all your interests. And whose blessing maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it? In whose favor is life? Who can do for you exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think? Suppose a general, after the termination of a war, returning home, and entering the presence of the king, the fountain of honour; and introducing one

by one those who had distinguished themselves under him: he calls them by name, he relates their exploits, he testifies their obedience, their skill, their prowess, their perseverance; and asks for their remuneration and preferment—What could be more gratifying and glorious? Yet what would this be, compared with the conduct of the Lord Jesus, the leader and commander of his people, when, his warfare being accomplished, he shall present those who have fought the good fight of faith before the throne of the Majesty of heaven and earth, and claim for them the promises of the new and everlasting covenant: “Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am to behold my glory”?

The Third is, The period of commendation. We all know how much depends upon the seasonableness of an action. There is a critical hour when a word spoken in our favour may gain for us a friendship we otherwise should not have known, or an office we should not otherwise have filled; yea, it may decide the whole of our future life. The Lord Jesus does not leave his people without witness now. In various ways he confesses them, even here. But in these words he refers to his confessing them before his Father “at the last day,” when he has summoned together the whole universe, and is distributing endless disgrace or honour, happiness or misery. They will have confidence, and not be ashamed before him *at his coming*.

Let this reconcile them to their present comparative obscurity. The world knoweth them not. It is not proper, it would not be safe, for them to have all their distinctions here. Their day is coming. It

is called the manifestation of the sons of God. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

NOVEMBER 18.—EVENING.

"Open thy mouth wide." Pa. lxxxi. 10.

THOUGH we cannot find out God, perfectly, in his essence or his works, we are not left in total ignorance concerning him. We have all the information our duty and our consolation can require. Though he be a God that hideth himself, yet he is the God of Israel, the Saviour. He has been pleased to reveal himself as the hearer of prayer—Yea more—as exciting it—as encouraging it—as concerned for the enlargement of our desires in the performance of it—"Open thy mouth wide."

To aid us herein, let us consider his greatness and all-sufficiency. We should expect more from a prince than from a pauper. Many have benevolence without resources; and in vain we address them: they may grieve to deny us, but they cannot relieve. When the woman cried, "Help, O king!" he said, "Whence should I help thee?" But we kneel before One, whose greatness is unsearchable; who is Lord of all. His giving a world would be less than our giving a crumb of bread. When Alexander had bestowed a very valuable present on a poor man, his modesty would have declined it: "It is too much," said he, "for me to receive"—"But," said the conqueror, "it is not too much for me to give." God gives like himself; and he is to be addressed in character with himself. We believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and

earth. Is it comfort we want? He is the God of all comfort. Is it deliverance? Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Is it renovation? He can make all things new—He is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.

Let us consider his goodness. Nothing tends to contract us more than a sense of our unworthiness. We ought to feel this: but we ought not to be discouraged by it; since he is the God of all grace, the Father of mercies: since he is rich in mercy, and delighteth in mercy. We are not to judge of him by a human standard. It is an injury to us, when we are applying to him, to think of the benevolence of the most generous of our fellow-creatures. They all come inconceivably short of his glory. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." And the reference, here, is to his thoughts and ways of mercy; and especially pardoning mercy.

Let us remember, also, the medium through which we implore his favours. We have boldness and access with confidence, by the faith of him. We have boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus; having such an High Priest over the house of God, we draw near in full assurance of faith. In saving and glorifying us, through the Son of his love, we do not ask God to deny his truth; or dishonour his name; or trample upon his law—Yea, he magnifies his law in doing it. He declares his righteousness. While he redeems Jacob, he glorifies himself in Israel: and glory to God in the highest, is

combined with peace on earth, and good-will towards men. Let us think of this; and ask, and receive, that our joy may be full—Whatsoever, said he, ye shall ask the Father, in my Name, he will do it.

Review, also, the manner in which he has answered the prayers of his people. Has he ever refused them? Has he ever given sparingly? Jacob asked for bread to eat, and raiment to put on, and a return in peace to his father's house: and, lo! he becomes two bands! Solomon asked for a wise and understanding heart: and he obtained, not only wisdom, but life, and riches, and honour! Abraham left off asking, with regard to Sodom, before God left off giving. Why did he stop at ten? Had not God complied with every preceding proposal, without the least reluctance? But Abraham was ashamed—he had not courage to go on.

But is it not sufficient that he has commanded it? Having his authority, you cannot be chargeable with presumption, if you ask much. Yea, you will be guilty of rebellion, if you refuse. How did he punish the guests who refused the invitation to the feast, "Come, for all things are now ready"!

Here is also an express assurance, a promise not only that we shall receive, but be filled—Open thy mouth wide, and "I will *fill* it." He will supply *all* our need from his riches in glory—He will bless us with *all* spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

Where is the Christian who lives up to his duty? or to his privilege? For God not only answers prayer really, but proportionally—He says, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Let not him, therefore, who prays rarely and coldly think to succeed like the frequent and fer-

vent petitioner. Honour God, and God will honour you. He does not despise the day of small things. But "the hand of the diligent maketh rich."

NOVEMBER 19.—MORNING.

"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" JOHN ix. 35.

THIS question was addressed to a man that had been blind. Some are blind by accident, and some by disease; but this man was born blind. He had never seen even the face of her who bore him, and who, as she fed him at her breast, would often look upon him, and weep over her orbless boy. Blindness is always a sufficient affliction in itself: but here penury was added to it. Like others of the same class of sufferers mentioned in the Gospels, he sat by the way-side, begging. Many had passed him, without notice: but Jesus had compassion on him. Some had given him alms—which was all he implored: but Jesus gave him eyes; and did for him beyond all that he could ask or think.

The cure was notorious. The common people acknowledge it; and they brought the man to the Pharisees, supposing that *they* would be equally ready to confess it too. But see how the plainest truth can be perplexed or doubted, when it comes before those whose interest it is to deny or conceal it. First, they admit the fact; but turn it against our Saviour, because he had done it on the Sabbath-day. This did not satisfy the people, who justly remarked, that, had he violated the Sabbath, he would have been a transgressor; and God would not have thus honoured a sinner. Then they pretend to question

the fact itself. They set aside the man's own testimony, and call in his parents. His parents affirm, that he was their son, and that he had been born blind; but, fearing lest they should be put out of the synagogue, they affect to be ignorant of the mode of his cure! How stubborn is truth! How hard is it to suppress evidence! The attempt is like trying to keep fire under ashes out in the wind. Again they call in the man himself; and, after an artless relation, which they could not resist; and an involuntary address, which they could not endure; "they cast him out"—that is, they drove him from their presence, and excommunicated him as a member of the Jewish synagogue. Informed of this, Jesus sought, and found him—and said unto him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

There are many foolish and useless questions asked by every individual. In the company of some persons we are in a perfect inquisition: we are tortured with inquiries concerning every body, and every thing. It would be well if many professors of religion were aware, that they are accountable, not only for their time, but their tongues; and would remember the language of our Saviour—"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Many of the inquiries in the theological world, which have engrossed so much attention, and injured so much temper, have turned on subjects too deep to be fathomed, or too trifling to merit regard. When Peter, wishing to know his designs concerning John, asked, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" he replied, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." A man, in the road, asked, "Lord, are there few that shall be saved?" But

Jesus "answered and said unto *them*," for he would not notice the trifler himself; but said unto *them* that were about him—"Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for I say unto you, that many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." If it be said, This was no answer to the question itself, we reply, that it *was* an answer; and the only *proper* answer—an answer by way of *rebuks*—an answer, informing *them*, and informing *us*—That "the secret things belong unto God; but things that are revealed are for us, and for our children"—and, That whatever be the number of the saved, we may be included in it, if we earnestly and immediately seek it.

But the question before us is founded in importance. We may infer this from the character of the inquirer: he never trifled, never spoke an idle word. And we may infer it, also, from the nature of the case itself. For what can be so important as faith in Christ? It is the principle of all religion. It is the only medium through which we can enjoy the blessings of the Gospel. Do we live? We "live by the faith of the Son of God." Do we walk? "We walk by faith." Do we stand? "By faith we stand." Do we conquer? "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." There is no justification without it—"Being justified by faith." There is no sanctification without it—"Sanctified by faith that is in me." There is no consolation without it—"In whom, believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." In a word, there is no salvation without it—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." The same things, therefore, in the Scripture, which are ascribed to Christ, are also ascribed to faith. The reason is, because it is only by

faith we can make use of Christ, for all the purposes which he is appointed to accomplish. It is only by faith we can receive him as the gift of God; enter him as a refuge; apply him as the balm of Gilead; and feed upon him as the bread of life.

And unless we believe on him, we not only incur the greatest loss we can incur, but we contract the greatest guilt we can contract. We disobey the express command of God—his dearest command; the command which involves all his glory in the highest degree — For “This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” We make him a liar. We throw unspeakable contempt upon his wisdom and goodness. He has, at an infinite expense, provided a Saviour, and brought him near, and pressed us to avail ourselves of him. And how can we condemn God so much as by making light of it, and rejecting it? “He that believeth not shall be damned.” “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”

What, then, can be so momentous as this question, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” And yet many never give it a serious thought! They can live on, year after year, without ever once inquiring, “Am I a believer or an unbeliever?”—though their everlasting all depends upon it—though now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation—though their breath is in their nostrils—and they know that their only opportunity is as uncertain as it is short.

Oh! the deceitfulness of sin! Oh! the madness of sinners! Oh! the influence of the God of this world, who blindeth the minds of them that believe not!

NOVEMBER 19.—EVENING.

"I am a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." 1 Pet. v. 1.

THIS is one of the three characters by which Peter here describes himself, to enforce his "exhortation." In the two former, wherein he calls himself "an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ," there is something personal to him; but in the third designation there is nothing peculiar—any further than all real religion is a peculiar thing in our world, where the multitude are evil, and thousands among those who wear the form of godliness are strangers to the power of it. But all who are born of the Spirit stand upon the same ground with Peter with regard to eternity. They are heirs together with him of the grace of life, and each of them is *authorized* to say, "I am a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." Hence three things are observable.

First, The destination of Christians is "glory." The radical idea of glory is brightness, splendour. The secondary notion is excellency displayed—and *this* is what the Scripture intends when it so frequently expresses heaven by the term glory. We think more of the happiness of the state than of the glory. But it will display all kinds of excellency—natural—corporeal—intellectual—moral—social excellency—and the excellency of pleasure, called, "the joy of the Lord," "joy unspeakable and full of *glory*."

Secondly, This glory is for future development—

It "shall be revealed." It has in a degree been revealed from the beginning. The Jews partially knew it; and as to a clearer discovery of the nature of it, and the way of obtaining it, life and immortality were brought to light through the Gospel. But as yet it has not been revealed externally to all; or internally to many; or completely to any: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Believers indeed have the advantage of something in addition to testimony; and they know more of heaven from their own experience than from what they read or hear. They have certain views and feelings which raise their sentiments more than any thing else—"Oh if these were rendered permanent and perfect!" But who can imagine what the perfection of them includes? Flesh and blood can no more comprehend than they can inherit the kingdom of God. The full disclosure would be too much for our physical powers to endure, and would subdue all the interest we feel in a thousand things which claim a share in our present attention. The degree of information is wisely adapted to our present state, and while it prepares us for our end does not disqualify us for the way. But we shall not always walk by faith. The object will not always be veiled. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but this we know, that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"—It "*shall* be revealed."

And, thirdly, it admits of present participation—"I am," says the Christian, "a partaker of this glory." This seems strange, and we are ready to exclaim, Is then his warfare accomplished? Has he

finished his course with joy? Has he passed the valley of the shadow of death? Does he not daily groan, being burdened with afflictions and infirmities? Yet, according to the Scripture, by grace he *is* saved; he *is* come to the new Jerusalem; he *hath* everlasting life; he *is* a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.

He is so by union with Christ, his head and representative, who procured it, and has prepared it for him, and has taken possession of it in his name, and holds it on his behalf—"He hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And he is so by the certitude and appropriation of faith: for faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. The believer can realize as sure and as present whatever God has engaged to give. He is so by actual possession in the foretastes, the earnest, the beginnings. Under whatever representations heaven be held forth, the Christian has it in quality, and in degree. He is a partaker of it as the bud partakes of the flower, and the dawn of the day, and the child of the man. The believer's anticipations are not confined to any particular season or condition; but he is often *peculiarly* a partaker of this glory in four cases—In the seclusion and liberty of the closet—In the ordinances of the sanctuary—In the supports and comforts of affliction—And in the elevated experience of a dying hour.

Is this your attainment? Can you say, "I am a partaker of the glory which shall be revealed"? How ought you to feel and to demean yourself? Walk

worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. Let your conversation become your condition—Let it be dignified, cheerful, and especially grateful. You were children of wrath, but are now heirs of glory; yea, and even partakers of it—What should you render for blessings so great, and obtained by means so infinitely expensive?

And if you are not partakers, should you not lay it to heart? Should you not seek after an interest in it? Whatever else you possess you must soon leave; and no abundance of it can afford you satisfaction even in the enjoyment. But here the object will relieve every want. It will fill up every desire. And success is sure to crown your application if you seek according to the true order. Only remember, the time of finding is both short and uncertain. You cannot be happy too soon; and your safety leaves you not a moment to lose—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

NOVEMBER 20.—MORNING.

"Did not I see thee in the garden with him?" JOHN xviii. 26

WHILE within my garden roving,
And my senses all are fed;
Rising from these lov'd attractions,
I'm to nobler subjects led:
Other gardens
Here, in musings, oft I tread.

First, I enter *Eden's* garden,
 Yielding pain, and profit, too ;
 Adam, here, while sinless standing,
 Nought of fear or sorrow knew
 But what changes
 Did from his offence ensue !

Then, with hope and joy reviving,
 To *Gethsemane* I go ;
 And approach, in that dread garden,
 Jesus, bearing all my woe
 From his anguish
 All my ease and safety flow.

In the Garden *where they laid him*,
 With the Marys there I sit ;
 Weeping, till I see him rising,
 And embrace his pierced feet :
 King of terrors,
 Now I can thy frownings meet !

In the *Church*, the *Saviour's* garden—
 Trees, and plants, and flowers I see ;
 Guarded, water'd, train'd, and cherish'd,
 Blooming immortality ;
 All transplanted
 From thy soil, O Calvary !

But, above all gardens precious,
 See the *Heavenly Paradise* :
 There the Tree of Life is bearing ;
 There the springs of glory rise :
 And the richness
 Every want and wish supplies.

There, the foot no thorn e'er pierces ;
 There, the heart ne'er heaves a sigh ;
 There, in white, we walk with Jesus ;
 All our lov'd connexions by :
 And, to reach it,
 'Tis a privilege to die !

NOVEMBER 20.—EVENING.

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Matt. xxv. 41.

WHAT a contrast between this sentence and the language addressed by the same Judge to those on his right hand! That says, "Ye blessed of my Father;" this, "Ye cursed." That says "Come;" this, "Depart." That says, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" this says, "Depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

The words are not for declamation, but belief. This "terror of the Lord" was not intended to be defined and comprehended, but was to be left to those forebodings of imagination in which there can be no danger of excess—"Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear so is thy wrath." We shall not therefore dwell upon the duration, or the nature, of this misery; but only remark three things.

The first regards the origin of this dreadful state. It was not, it seems, at first provided for the human race, but "prepared for the devil and his angels." Yet, being prepared, the abode could receive any other rebels as well as they; and those who will join his party in our world, and do the works of the devil, as they have shared in the same sin, must share in the same suffering with him and his followers. Thus the sinner renders *their* place his *own*; as it is said of Judas. "he went to his own place."

The second regards the certainty of the doom. The denouncement is not an idle tale: it is not the offspring of the nursery, or the creation of priest-craft. The consciences of men tell them this, and much more frequently and seriously than they are willing to acknowledge. The misery is such, that if there was only a probability, or even a possibility of incurring it, wisdom would justify a submission to all the self-denial and sacrifices the Gospel demands. The children of this world act upon this principle, where their temporal interests are concerned. They throw overboard the lading of the vessel when they are not sure, but only apprehensive of a shipwreck; and yield to the painful excision of a limb when the preservation of the whole body is not certain, but probable, and in some cases only possible. But before a man can suppose that this misery is not possible, and even probable; before he can question the certainty of it, he must prove either that our Lord never uttered these words as the Gospel affirms, or that if he did utter them he is not to be depended upon. But he is the faithful witness; and the Scripture cannot be broken. What a task, then, has the infidel to perform before he can lay his apprehensions to rest and bid defiance to this sentence!—He must prove that the Bible is a lie, or Jesus a liar. Men may be ignorant of these things, but they must be "willingly ignorant." And they cannot be ignorant long. And, considering the uncertainty of life, how soon, very soon may they be convinced, too late! Hobbes said, when dying, "I yield my body to the earth, and my soul to the great Perhaps." Thistlewood the traitor said to one of his comrades as he was ascending the drop, "We shall soon know the

great secret"—He meant, whether there was another world; and after death the judgment. What wretched infatuation to leave the decision till the discovery and the remedilessness arrive together! It is hardly necessary to observe, that the denial of the thing will not disprove it. Suppose a criminal by some delusion persuades himself that the assize will not be kept—He goes on—but while he is engaged or amused, hark! the trumpets sound, the judge is entering, and to-morrow he must appear. Men may reason, disbelieve, ridicule; but the scene neither slumbers nor lingers—"The end is come! the end is come!"

The third respects the character of those who fall under the malediction. And surely they must be persons charged with crimes too shocking for human nature often to commit: surely they can only be Cains, and Pharaohs, and Belshazzars, and Herods, and Robespierres. But no. They are not represented as tyrants, robbers, adulterers, murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers. Many of them were free from what is commonly called vice. They had negative virtues, and often boasted that they did no harm. But they led easy and indolent lives. They exercised no self-denial. They made no sacrifices not only for God whom they had not seen, but for their brother whom they had seen. They have judgment without mercy, because they shewed no mercy. They had unfeeling hearts, and tearless eyes; their hands never relieved the necessitous; their feet never visited the door of affliction—It is the decision of One too wise to be mistaken, and too faithful to misrepresent—"For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave

me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."

NOVEMBER 21.—MORNING.

"Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

2 KINGS xiii. 14.

ELIJAH was spared the common doom of mortality, and was taken to heaven in a chariot and horses of fire, without dying. But Elisha, who had honoured God so much longer, goes the way of all the earth. Why was this difference? Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.

But he does not die of natural infirmity. Neither does he die suddenly—He had fallen sick. This mode of dissolution was less desirable with regard to comfort; but it was more favourable to usefulness. It afforded him opportunity for glorifying God, and instructing and impressing his attendants. And "the chamber where the good man meets his fate"

has often been to others, as well as to the dying individual himself, the house of God, and the gate of heaven. We are therefore glad to find Joash, the king of Israel, with Elisha in this situation. Such a scene is generally very uninviting to persons in the upper ranks of life. They love not, in the midst of flattery and dissipation, to be reminded of the days of darkness. Yet "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning: but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." It is more serious, and more soft.

But who was this Joash? "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. He departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin: but he walked therein." Who would have looked for such a man here? Yet see the trouble he takes. He does not send to enquire after the dying prophet, but personally visits him. See his condescension and humility in entering "a little chamber on the wall, with a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick." See his tenderness in hanging over the expiring saint, and weeping. See his knowledge of the value and importance of Elisha—"Ah! what shall I do, and what will my people do, when thou art gone?—My father! my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" How much like a pious man does Joash now appear! How little can we judge of men by particular conditions, events, and feelings! Who has not had powerful convictions? Who has not often exclaimed, "Let

me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his?" Who has not, like Felix, trembled under the preaching of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come? Of whom has it not, in some period, been said, as it was of the young man in the Gospel, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God?

—What brings Joash here now? He had disregarded and despised Elisha before. But Elisha is now *going*. "How mercies brighten, as they take their flight!" How an undutiful child prizes a parent when he is following him to the grave! How many would listen to the voice of the preacher when they can hear him no more! Even the Jews, who so often would have stoned Moses, mourned for him many days.—Who would have thought that all these fine impressions would have worn off? But Joash leaves the dying room, and the honoured prophet, and enters ordinary life, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. The tempting scenes of greatness again seduce him; and his iniquities, like the wind, take him away! And who would have thought, that, after the wreck of all his worldly substance; or the loss of a Joseph and Benjamin; or the taking away of the wife of his bosom with a stroke; or the awfulness of a disease that led him down to the gates of death, and induced him to cry, Oh! spare me a little longer!—who would have imagined, that—after such lessons—any man could turn again to folly, and walk more eagerly according to the course of this world! "O Ephraim!" says God, "what shall I do unto thee? O Judah! what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away?"

The devotion of natural men depends upon external

excitement. They pour out a prayer when God's chastening hand is upon them: but they do not delight themselves in the Almighty; they do not always call upon God. The summer brook may by a storm be swelled into a flood; but, having no permanent source, it soon rolls off, and the bed is dry. A Christian's devotion may be aided by outward helps; but it does not depend upon them. His practice flows from principle; and he exemplifies the promise—"The water that I will give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." And "he only that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."

NOVEMBER 21.—EVENING.

"And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice."

2 KINGS xiii. 19.

ELISHA was now on his dying bed; and, being visited by Joash, the king of Israel, who was deeply affected with the interview, he gave him two orders, the one to shoot and the other to smite. Both these were doubtless delivered under a prophetic impulse; and though they may seem strange to us, they were well understood by the parties.

—"And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it; and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands. And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then

Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them." The Romans were accustomed to declare war against an enemy by shooting an arrow into their territory. Alexander also did this when he entered Persia. This order, therefore, was an intimation of war. Accordingly it was discharged "eastward;" that is, towards Syria. But the man of God arose while he held the bow, and put his left hand upon the king's left hand, and his right hand upon the king's right hand. For what purpose? Elisha was the representative of God, in whose name he now spake; and he thus teaches the king—that, though he should use means, he should not depend upon them—that the excellency of the power was not of the weapons, but of God—and that, if his bow abode in strength, the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. It is therefore called the arrow of the *Lord's* deliverance; and by which the Syrians were to be vanquished in Aphek.

And is it not so with us? When we work, God must work with us. If his hand be not with us for good, what is our prudence, our resolution, our energy? "Not by might, nor by power; but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." Thus the apostles went forth, preaching; and the "hand of the Lord was with them; and many believed and turned unto the Lord."

Again he said, "Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said,

Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice." Joash was conscious that the action was a sign, or he could not have been blameable. The action, therefore, betrayed remissness and lukewarmness: it was expressive of his disposition; and it indicated the event. He therefore shewed that he was not willing to push the war to a complete issue: he was only for injuring and enfeebling the enemy he *might* and *ought* to have *destroyed*. And so the prophet viewed it. He saw that he was half-hearted, and would not improve his advantages. He should have resembled David, who could say, "I have pursued mine enemies, and have overtaken them: neither did I turn again till they were consumed. I have wounded them that they were not able to rise: they are fallen under my feet. Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind; I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets." But Joash was more disposed to imitate Ahab, who, when Benadad was delivered into his hand, suffered him to escape, and to recover his power and means of annoying again; in consequence of which God said, "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people."

Elisha, therefore, was offended with Joash. And was it not enough in such a case to grieve a man of God, burning with holy zeal for his cause? And is it not grievous to God's ministers now, when *we* are not strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus? We have his promises and invitations; and we have the experience of his people, living and dying—all shewing

us how willing he is to help; and make us more than conquerors. But, alas! we are satisfied with *little*—not in temporal things—where contentment is a virtue; but in spiritual things—where moderation is a crime.

Say not, Why, O why, did not Joash continue smiting until the prophet said—"It is enough"? Are not you chargeable with the very same offence? Are not you satisfied with slightly wounding your spiritual enemies, instead of breathing after an entire victory over them?—Are not you disposed to live on a little corner of your estate, when there remains yet very much land to be possessed?

Look at your desires! Are they not formal and few? Do you hunger and thirst after righteousness? Do your souls break for the longings they have unto God's judgments at all times? Do you open your mouth wide, that God may fill it? Do you pray, that, according to the riches of his glory, he would strengthen you with might by his spirit in the inner man? that you may know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge? that you may be filled with all the fulness of God?

Look at your expectations! Are they not few and faint? Is your hope a lively hope? Is it vigorous enough to counteract the impressions of the world? Do you abound in hope? Does it bear any proportion to the exceeding great and precious promises?

Look at your exertions! Are they not few and languid? An occasional retirement—a hasty performance of private devotion—a formal service at the family altar—a forgetful hearing of the word—without early rising—without self-denial—without taking up your cross—without *labouring* for the meat that

endureth unto everlasting life—without *striving* to enter in at the strait gate—without *fighting* the good fight of faith—and taking the kingdom of heaven by force—O this vile moderation! This guilty relaxation! This smiting thrice only, instead of going forward and deeming nothing done while anything remains to be done!

Wherefore, “giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

NOVEMBER 22.—MORNING.

“And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.”

2 KINGS xiii. 20, 21.

HERE we see the Moabites did not come in a large army, but in particular bands, to pillage and alarm.

It shows us in how undefended a state, at this period, the country must have been. But what has this to do with the death and burial of Elisha? The one is mentioned in connexion with the other; and has a reference to the exclamation the king made in his dying chamber, "O my father! my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" And see, would the historian say; see how soon this began to be exemplified! Does this cause seem inadequate to the effect? Who has not observed the importance of individuality? When Goliath came forward challenging, all the army of Israel fled. What a terror was Samson to the Philistines! They could do nothing till they had got rid of him. There are persons who are the life, the soul, of a party, or a community. What enterprises for the glory of God, and the spread of the Gospel, have originated from one Christian! The death of a minister has been the signal for the division and dispersion of a congregation raised by his talents and zeal—"I know," says Paul, "that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

What is there peculiar here? The intimation of the historian is constantly and variously held forth in the Scripture at large. There we see the regard God pays to his people. "Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all."

"Oft have our fathers told,
Our eyes have often seen,
How well our God secures the fold
Where his own sheep have been."

The ungrateful world despises them. Yet how much do even *they* owe to the presence and the prayers of the saints! By them blessings have been obtained, or continued. They have withholden or removed judgments. They have been the "healers of the breach, the restorers of paths to dwell in." Shall not we love them? Shall not we pray for their increase?

But here was a thing very accidental, as to the persons employed. They were a funeral party, and were going to carry the corpse further: but, seeing a number of their invaders, and wishing to make a timely escape, they hastily laid it in the grave of Elisha, which happened to be at hand. But how wonderful was the result! "When the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet!" Here the Papists come (and to what other place can they come so well?) to find something to favour the doctrine of relics. Which of their churches is not furnished with the supposed remains of saints?—Some of these saints, too, were little better than demons. But, allowing them to have been real saints, what profit is there in their bones when they go down to the grave? The virtue here was not in the bones of Elisha, but in the power of God. And what a stupendous miracle was it! "Surely, had not the people been blind and impenitent, they must have been brought to repentance." So we think—but who said, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead"? Whether there were as yet any Sadducees in Israel we know not. If there were, they here saw a proof and an instance that the dead can be re-animated—and it matters not, as to the miracle of the fact, whether

it took place two days after death, or two thousand years. God alone could have done it. And why should it be thought a thing incredible that *God* should raise the dead? *His* power is almighty; and we see what changes and revivals it is continually producing in nature. But with us the subject admits of no doubt—We believe (the Lord prepare us for it!) that “there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”

The fathers—where are they? and the prophets—do they live for ever? No. The dearest, the greatest, the most useful of his servants die. But “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” We are losers; but, to them, to die is gain. They are privileged in it. They are privileged by it. And it is desirable to be near them living, dying, and dead: in time; and in eternity. “Gather not my soul with sinners.” I would “take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew; saying, I will go with you, for I have heard that God is with you.”—“Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also if aught but death part thee and me.”

God can honour his servants after they are in their graves. The memory of the just is blessed—and useful too. Yes; you may be the means of awakening and enlivening persons after your death—not by quickening their mortal bodies; but their souls, which were dead in trespasses and sins: not by your bones; but by your example, which will still

operate; by your instructions, which shall still speak; by the prayers you offered; by the books you gave; by the minister you educated; by the place of worship you built, while you were yet living.

—Every thing should lead us to the Saviour. How much any of the Jews at this time knew of the Messiah we cannot ascertain. But *we* know, that because he died, we shall live. We know that if we were planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. He made the grave his own, by residence and consecration — Behold the place where the Lord lay! Into this grave we must descend. But we shall arise from it, not only living, but immortal; not, like this man, to die again, but to die no more; death having no more dominion over us. “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they rise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”

NOVEMBER 22.—EVENING.

“ I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.”

RUTH i. 21.

THESE are the words of Naomi, who, from the famine which raged in her own country, had fled to Moab for succour, and had now returned back to her native place. In a village, every occurrence, especially the coming back of an inhabitant after years of absence, excites notice, and the news soon spreads through the neighbourhood. So it was here. The arrival of Naomi, accompanied with Ruth, her daughter-in-law, awakens curiosity, and huddles together the rustics in little groups, pointing with the finger,

and making remarks and inquiries—"So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them; and they said, is this Naomi?" At which she burst into tears, and said, "Call me not Naomi"—that is, pleasant; "call me Mara"—that is, bitter: "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me—I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." Whence we may observe,

That when persons go from home, they little think what may befall them before their return. This will apply even to life itself. Some, like Elimelech, never come back. An accident demolishes their frame; or a disease arrests them too violently to admit of their removal: their relations arrive just in time to see them die, or they die in the midst of strangers. They little imagined that when they left their own door they were never to enter it again; and that the leave they had taken of their family was a farewell for ever. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

It applies also as to character. Some have been converted while from home: they have met with a godly acquaintance whose conversation, or have attended an evangelical minister whose preaching, has

been useful to their souls; and they have returned with new views and feelings, and have become all anxious to bring their connexions into the same state with themselves. Others, alas! have gone out moral and returned vicious, profaning the Sabbath they had once revered as the holy of the Lord and honorable; and ridiculing a book which they once regarded as given by inspiration of God. How many, in travelling, run uncalled for into dangers! And how necessary is it, even in lawful, because necessary journeys, to commit our way unto the Lord, and pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!"

It also applies to our outward circumstances. Some go out empty, and come home again full. This was the case with Jacob. He left Beer-sheba with nothing but the charge and blessing of Isaac: and in his pleading with God in his journey, he only asks for bread to eat, and raiment to put on, and a return to his father's house in peace. But hear him on his return: "With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." And thus it has been with many since. They set off with no raised expectation, and with no design formed, except to gain a humble subsistence: but difficulties vanished before them; the Lord prospered their way; blessed the labour of their hands; and gave them power to get wealth. Others have gone out with confidence flattered by the most pleasing prospects. But every enterprise failed; every dependence gave way; every comfort fled; till they were left like a beacon upon the top of the mountain, or a vessel stranded and wrecked upon the shore—therefore we observe again,

That it is no unusual thing for the same individual

to experience both fulness and privation. "Ah," says Naomi, "once I had a husband, now I am a widow. Once I had children, now I am childless. Once I had importance, now I am without influence. Once I had substance, now I am destitute—I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." Not only is there a diversity of conditions among men, so that while one is in splendour another is in obscurity, and while one is rich another is poor—but the very same person may successively be distinguished and neglected, be wealthy and indigent. These transitions are sometimes gradual; and sometimes sudden and wholly unlooked for. But Scripture, and all history and observation, more than remind us of the possibility of these changes; and wisdom admonishes us to improve them—First, by not depending upon our possessions and enjoyments. Shall we set our hearts on that which is not? Secondly, by using them liberally while we have them. Riches make to themselves wings, and flee away: but, says an old writer, we may clip their wings by charity. And Solomon says, "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again." So that not only is the principal safe, but the interest divine. "Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight: for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." And, Thirdly, by being prepared for every vicissitude. "I know," says Paul, "how to be abased, and how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." It is one thing to

know what it is to possess, and what it is to lose; and another to know *how*—that is, how to behave in each as becometh the principles of a Christian. It is a great thing to prosper and not be exalted above measure; and to be reduced without being swallowed up of overmuch sorrow: to be full and not deny him, and say, Who is the Lord? and to be poor, and not steal or take the name of our God in vain. Yet this is possible; and through the grace of the Holy Spirit the soul may be braced up to such a moral strength of constitution, as to brave any climate or change of weather, however great or sudden.

See also how piety will acknowledge the hand of God in every event. An ordinary mind would have said, "I went out full, and am come back empty." But Naomi did not live without God with her in the world—Naomi says, "I went out full, and *the Lord hath brought me home again empty.*" So Eli said, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." And Job, instead of dwelling on the Sabeans and the elements, said, "*The Lord hath taken away.* Blessed be the name of the Lord."

God is not the author of sin; but as to suffering—"Is there an evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it?" Does not he make darkness as well as create light? There is nothing like chance, especially in our trials; neither are we to think only or principally of second causes. It is a view of God's agency alone that can preserve us either from sinning or sinking in the day of adversity. But the cup which my Father giveth me shall I not drink it? I can trust in him—He spared not his own Son—He has always my welfare at heart—

"Good when he gives, supremely good;
Nor less when he denies :
E'en crosses from his sovereign hand
Are blessings in disguise."

Oh let me hold communion with him, not only in his word, but in his works; not only in his ordinances, but in his dispensations. Let me cleave to him as my exceeding joy, and my everlasting portion, in all the revolutions of time. And look forward not only to a pure, but permanent state of blessedness—

"All, all on earth is shadow—all beyond
Is substance. The reverse is Folly's creed.
How solid all where change shall be no more!"

NOVEMBER 23—MORNING.

"Tell them which are bidden, Behold I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage."
MATT. xxii. 4.

GOD has provided for all his creatures according to their kinds: "the eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their meat in due season." Man is a compound being; for his body there is the storehouse and wardrobe of nature. But in all this there is nothing for his nobler part, the mind. Here the Gospel comes in to meet its exigencies—and with nothing less than a feast—and while every other feast is for the body, this is entirely for the soul.

The spirituality of this feast constitutes the excellency of it, and at the same time accounts for the neglect of it. If provision was made to gratify the animal appetites, or the desire for worldly riches and honour, it would easily excite attention. But

men are earthly, and sensual; they are governed by things that are seen and temporal. Hence they hear of spiritual and everlasting things with indifference. But is not this folly and madness? Is not the mind the man? Does not he who knew the value of the soul from the price he paid for the redemption of it, does not he ask, "What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

The feast here is not an ordinary one. It is a royal feast, a royal marriage feast, a royal marriage feast for the king's son. Yet what may we look for in such a feast as this, that is not to be found in the dispensation of the Gospel?

Is it plentitude? Here we have it. We read of "abundant mercy"—of "plenteous redemption"—of a Saviour "full of grace and truth"—of "all the fulness of God." Is it variety? Here we have it. Our wants and hopes are not only numerous, but various; and equally so are our supplies. Here is light for our darkness. Righteousness for our guilt. Strength for our weakness. Renovation for the heart. Peace for the conscience. The supply of the Spirit. The comforts of the Holy Ghost. Is it richness of entertainment? What else can be the meaning of the expressions, "A feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined"? God prepares dainties for his guests, and they are all supreme in their kind, and infinitely expensive. The Jews did eat angels' food: but what was the manna in the Desert compared with the bread of life? He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into

the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Is it fellowship? A feast is not a private meal, an individual indulgence; but an entertainment designed to promote friendship, and social intercourse, and gratification. And here we have it. We are not solitary partakers, but have companions the most agreeable, and excellent, and numerous. We sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, with prophets and apostles, with the noble army of martyrs; with the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven. Is it enjoyment? A man at a feast discharges himself from anxieties, and gives up himself to pleasure and delight—"a feast is made for laughter." "Joy becomes a feast," and is promoted by it. But no pleasure, no delight can resemble that which results from an experience of Divine grace. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound." What a contrast between them and others! "Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit."

Yet it is lamentable to think that, though all things are ready, and all are invited to the feast, many make light of it and go their way. We are therefore commanded to "compel" you to come in, that the house may be filled. Not that violence is to be employed. The compulsion is to be suited to a rational nature; and therefore to consist only of the urgency of persuasion by argument and motive. And here the difficulty lies not in convincing the

judgment—since no one, unless an infidel, will deny the propriety of complying with this call at some time—but *not at present*. Go thy way, therefore, at *this* time, you really, if not verbally, say to the importunity: when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee. But is not this delay and postponement infinitely dangerous? Your season, your only season, is rapidly passing away. How soon will the bridge be drawn, and the door be shut! And then the things which belong to your peace will be hid from your eyes. Admitting that, according to your *present* feelings, you are resolved to seek at some future period, that period may never come. Sickness is not always the forerunner of death. The disease too may render you incapable of thought, and then your proposed repentance will be impracticable. Impracticable it will always be, unless the Spirit of God works in you; but if you resist his strivings now, what right have you to expect that he will return then, and by the most wonderful operation conquer your inveterate indisposition?

Yea, the procrastination is as unreasonable as it is dangerous. Your compliance is as necessary to your living comfortably as to your dying safely. Though the happiness of those who receive Christ Jesus the Lord is completed above, it is begun below. They have many present attainments. They do enter into rest. Their souls are satisfied as with marrow and fatness. The Lord is their shepherd. To him they have committed all their concerns. All that is really good for them is secured by his power, love, and promise. Their tormenting fears are removed. Their vain and restless desires are subdued. They have indeed their afflictions, but these are sanctified and

softened; and in a little time all tears shall be wiped from their eyes. Can you imagine that God will suffer his enemies to be more happy than his friends? Can a persuasion that God is your Father, and death your deliverer, and heaven your home, tend to make you less happy? What has the world done for you? Have you not found the way of transgressors hard? Forsake the foolish and live. All is "prepared" for you—God is ready to receive you, angels are ready to rejoice over you, believers are ready to hail you—"All things are ready—Come unto the marriage."

NOVEMBER 23.—EVENING.

"HE THAT DOETH TRUTH cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." JOHN iii. 21.

OF the individual here spoken of, the CHARACTER, the BUSINESS, and the AIM are all very instructive and improving.

What is his CHARACTER? "*He doeth truth.*" It is not said he readeth truth, heareth truth, speaketh truth, but doeth truth. Doing truth is rather a peculiar expression; and the question is, how truth is to be here understood. Now there is the truth of doctrine, and the truth of sincerity.

He doeth truth, according to the former of these, who pays it practical attention. In this case the truth is the word of God, which is filled, not with curious speculations, but matters of unspeakable importance; and designed not to inform our judgments only, but to sanctify and govern our hearts and lives. Hence it is called "The way of truth," because it is something in which we are to walk: we frequently read of "walking in the truth." "If ye know these

things," says our Saviour, "happy are ye if ye *do* them;" and he compares the man who heareth his sayings, and *doeth* them not, to a fool who builds his house upon the sand, and is ruined by the storm. The Apostle speaks of "the work of faith;" and tells us the word of God "worketh effectually in them that believe." The whole of it is a doctrine "according to godliness." No part of it can be uninfluential when properly regarded. Its threatenings are designed and adapted to awaken our fear. Its promises are to excite our hope. It is needless to mention its commands—these can be given for no other purpose than to be obeyed. And are we not commanded to forsake the world, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, to follow the Saviour, to go forth to him without the camp bearing his reproach, and when we have done all to say we are unprofitable servants, and to look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life? And he that doeth this, doeth truth.

He doeth truth, according to the latter of these, who acts consistently with his convictions of it. There are many who resist their belief; or, as the Apostle says, "hold the truth in unrighteousness:" the word is, imprison it. They will not suffer it to enter their tempers, and sway their conduct. They believe that the world is vanity and vexation of spirit, and the belief is true, yet it does not induce them to forsake it. They believe that the worship of God in their families is a duty, and the belief is true, yet they neglect it. The same may be said of a thousand other things. But the man that doeth truth gives up himself to his convictions, and follows them whithersoever they lead him, regardless of consequences. He may have little knowledge for the time,

but he conforms to it; for sincerity cannot consist with the omission of any known duty, or the indulgence of any known sin. Nathanael was the very man in our text; and therefore our Lord said of him, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." He had laboured under considerable mistakes; but he loved retirement, and had been alone praying to be made wise unto salvation. He had little light, but he sought for more; he was open to advice and reproof; he complied with Philip's invitation, "Come and see" for thyself; and upon our Saviour's intimation, "When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee," he exclaimed, "Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel"—And upon this Jesus promised to shew him "greater things than these."

There are some who are not equally prudent and kind. They are not tender of persons who cannot for the time go all their lengths. Yet were not they led into their present views step by step? Have they not been for years learning what they do not yet sufficiently understand? And do they wonder that others are not completely initiated in a few days or weeks? What a difference is there between the dawn and the day! and yet is not the one the beginning and the pledge of the other? And "the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." And "then," says the prophet, "shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." If I see a man convinced of sin, humbled under a sense of his unworthiness, delivered from the spirit of the world, and seriously engaged in the use of the means

of grace, let me not be harsh because he feels some doubts and difficulties from which others are *now* delivered: let me affectionately admonish him, as far as he has already attained, to walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing, assured that, if in anything else he be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto him in his own time, and way, and degree. Let me not engage him in angry disputes, or force upon him the deep things of God which he is unprepared to receive; but leave him for time, and observation, and experience, to enlarge his views, and be willing to teach him as he is able to hear it. Paul gave strong meat to them that were of full age, and who by reason of use had their senses exercised to discern both good and evil: but he fed babes with milk—some give babes strong meat, yea, and even the bones of controversy!

It is well for persons to try their ground, and to feel their own way; and he walketh surely that walketh uprightly; and he that doth his will shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God. Some of the most eminent characters that have adorned the Church attained their evangelical sentiments by degrees, and principally derived them from experience. The changes in nature are gradual; the seasons melt into each other; there are no disruptions. There also things are slower in their growth in proportion to their value. The oak, the king of the forest, does not shoot up all at once like nettles and reeds. The mushroom is the vegetation of a night.—We are not fond of mushroom-converts. We have never been taught by the result to admire those who instantly become so wise, talkative, disputations, and decisive. Their knowledge gets dangerously in advance, while

its companions and guardians, experience and practice, are left so far behind. The knowledge they boast of is like the head of a rickety child, too large for the other parts of the body: it is the effect not of strength, but of weakness and disease; and by destroying proportion is not a beauty, but a deformity.

Whatever be the defects of him that doeth truth, he may be known by this—If he has not the light, "*he cometh to the light.*"

NOVEMBER 24.—MORNING.

"He that doeth truth COMETH TO THE LIGHT, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." JOHN iii. 21.

WHAT is his BUSINESS?

"*He cometh to the light.*" He is not averse to it. He is not afraid of it. Why should *he* wish to shun it? It is for the thief, the murderer, the adulterer, to feel the morning as the shadow of death; not the man who is honestly going forth to his work, and to labour until the evening. "If," says the man that is upright in the way—"if I am not right, I wish, above all things, to *be* right, and to be led into *all* truth. Hide nothing from me. Where my soul and eternity are concerned, I dread delusion. I cannot bear uncertainty. Let me come to the light." And how does he this? He does it five ways.

He comes to the light by self-inspection. There are cases in which he will more solemnly and expressly examine himself: such as, the close of the year and when he is approaching the table of the

Lord; and when under those events which are called by the sacred writers trials, because they are intended to shew us what manner of spirit we are of. But he will be habitually a self-observer; and will look not only at his actions, but especially at his motives and the state of his heart.

He comes to the light by attention to the Scriptures. To their decisions, and counsels, and reproofs, he endeavours to lay himself fairly open. And, instead of turning away from those parts which more particularly bear upon his own office and condition, towards *them* he will look more frequently and fully. "Am I a parent? Am I a member of a church? Am I poor? Am I prosperous? Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

He comes to the light by hearing the word preached. The minister is to take forth the precious from the vile; to discriminate characters, to divide the word of truth, and to give to every hearer his appropriate encouragement or censure. And he that doeth truth will receive his word with meekness. He will not try to bribe the prophet, or desire him to prophesy smooth things. He will not be offended because the preacher is faithful; but will say to him, as Eli did to Samuel, who had received a message from God concerning him, "What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee." Such a man is likely to apply too much to himself rather than too little. And this will commonly be the case with regard to those things which are said to unmask hypocrites, and to exclude the usurpers of religious privileges. It is not easy says

Bishop Hall, to beat out the dogs without making the children cry.

He cometh to the light by religious intercourse. "They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward." And whom can they better consult, than those who know the way, not from maps and books only, but from having, and some of them a long time, travelled in it themselves? They feel an interest in such inquiries, and will be sure to sympathize with them; and will be able to solve many a doubt, and remove many a fear. They can speak from their own experience. And, blessed be God, there are few neighbourhoods now in which such helpers as these are not to be found—and the Lord add to his people, how many soever they be, a hundred-fold!

Above all, he doth this by prayer; humble, and earnest, and persevering prayer, for Divine teaching. This is *indeed* coming to the light; it is coming to the fountain of light, coming to "the Father of lights," from whom every good and every perfect gift descends. He will convince us that the way of man is not in himself, and that no means, however good in themselves, can render needless his own agency. But none teacheth like him. He can make the very deaf to hear, and the blind to see. Under the influence of his direction, the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. Happy they who are brought to his feet, and are crying from the heart, "Lead me in thy truth and guide me; for thou art the God of my salvation, on *Thee* do I wait all the day." "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way ever-

lasting." They will not, they cannot seek him in vain. He has said, and the Scripture cannot be broken, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!"

NOVEMBER 24.—EVENING.

"He that doeth truth cometh to the light, THAT HIS DEEDS MAY BE MADE MANIFEST THAT THEY ARE WROUGHT IN GOD." JOHN iii. 21.

WHAT IS HIS AIM?

"That his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."

The aim is personal: "*His deeds.*" There are some who live much abroad, and are eager to pry into the affairs and condition of others, and it extends even to their religious concerns. But we are commanded to "commune with our own hearts." When our Lord had foretold the duty and destiny of Peter, Peter should have instantly prayed, "Lord, prepare me for all thy will;" but, instead of this, he asks, concerning John, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" But our Saviour, far from encouraging such curiosity, said, "What if I will that he tarry till I come? What is that to thee? Follow thou me." Many, it is to be feared, in reading and hearing, think more of others than of themselves; but we should endeavour to bring home the subject, whatever it be, to our own souls—"Am I neglecting this

duty? Do I stand exposed to this threatening? Am I the heir of this promise? Have I any part or lot in this matter? Is *my* heart right in the sight of God?" This is the case with the man that "doeth truth and cometh to the light."

The aim is practical: that "*his deeds*"—Not his opinions and sentiments only or principally. *They* are indeed of importance, and he will be concerned to have them in accordance with the Scripture: but if a man does not in his inquiry go beyond the determination of the orthodoxy of his creed, he forgets that the devils also believe and tremble. He forgets that faith without works is dead, being alone. "Can faith save him?" Yes; but not *such* faith: and this was the meaning of the Apostle. The faith that saves, as he observes, *shews* itself by its *works*. It works by love; it purifies the heart; it overcometh the world. Real believers stand, walk, live, by faith. We therefore must look after the influences and effects of the truth as it is in Jesus: we must remark our *deeds*, our actions, conduct, course of life. If we know these things, happy are we if we do them—By this our state and character are to be evinced: "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

The aim is important: "That his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." That is, whether they are the mere produce of nature, or the genuine effects of Divine grace. Here it is admitted as a principle that the religion of a Christian is not self-derived, but springs from a Divine source. How can it be otherwise? Who can bring

a clean thing out of an unclean? The stream cannot rise higher than the fountain: no effect can exceed its cause, in any thing. That which is of the flesh is flesh; but that which is spiritual must be of the Spirit. Accordingly God has promised to put his spirit within his people; and to this every thing good, either possessed or done by them, is ascribed—They are his workmanship—This people, says he, have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.

And behold the grand point to decide. It would indeed be absurd to press some of you to determine this thing. It is obvious already that *your* deeds are not wrought in God. *You* can feel no uncertainty in your minds concerning it. *You* must be sure that your disregard of private prayer, your neglect of family worship, your violations of the Sabbath, your intemperance, pride, covetousness, and revenge, cannot come from the Spirit of him that calleth you.

But some persons make pretensions to piety who would do well to inquire—whether there is any thing in their religion that requires or bespeaks a Divine agency. For surely they may have a form of knowledge, or a form of godliness; they may come to his house, and honour him with their lips; they may pray without desire, and sing without praise; without having the spirit of the living God dwelling in them. Are we not only convinced but converted? Not only reformed, but renovated? Not only excited in our passions, but transformed by the renewing of the mind? Have we not only another heart, but a new one? Do we differ not only from others, but from our former selves? Do we worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have

no confidence in the flesh? Do we bear any of the unerring features of the household of faith? Do we feel like them? Are our joys, and sorrows, and hopes, and fears, the same with theirs who are led by the Spirit of God and are the sons of God? Are we running with them in the race that is set before us? and fighting with them the good fight of faith?

How much depends upon the decision! It involves the glory of God. For we cannot praise him for doing what we think he has not done, or conferring what we think he has not conferred. We may bless him for the exercise of his patience, and for favouring us with space for repentance, and the means of grace; but this is not the glowing gratitude of the man who can say, "Thou hast wrought all our works in us." It also must affect our own comfort: according to the words of the Apostle; "Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." The joy does not arise from the consciousness of his being the *author* of the work, but the *subject* of it: it is his "own work," not as it is wrought *by* him, but *in* him. And how delightful, how animating must the persuasion of this divine reality prove! And what may we not expect from the experience of it! "Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who hath also given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."

The decision is not more important than it is possible. We are commanded to seek it. We are provided with all the means and assistances essential to the attainment. The very anxiety to determine is a token for good; and is here made by our Lord.

himself to characterize the subject: "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."

NOVEMBER 25.—MORNING.

"The righteous shall flourish." Pa. xcii. 12.

PROSPERITY in the divine life is the Christian's duty—and therefore he is commanded to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. It is his desire—and hence he prays, Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us. It is his privilege—and thus it is provided for, and secured, by divine promise—"The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." David here tells us, that "the righteous shall flourish." And he tells us—

How he shall flourish—"He shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." Of the wicked he had said just before, "When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever." They flourish as the *grass*, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven. What a contrast with the worthlessness, the weakness, transitoriness, and destiny, of grass—in a warm country too—are the palm tree and cedar in Lebanon! They are evergreens. How beautifully, how firmly, how largely, they grow! How strong and lofty is the cedar! How upright, and majestic, and tall, the palm tree—The palm also bears fruit, called dates, like bunches of grapes. It sometimes yields a hundred-weight at once.

He tells us *where* he shall flourish—"Those that

be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." The allusion is striking. It compares the house of God to a garden, or fine well-watered soil, favourable to the life, and verdure, and fertility, of the trees fixed there. The reason is, that in the sanctuary we have the communion of saints. *There* our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. *There* are dispensed the ordinances of religion, and the word of truth. *There* God commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore. "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." They that wait upon the Lord renew their strength. Hence, from their own experience, as well as from the word of promise, they are increasingly induced to say, with David—"I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

He also tells us *when* he shall flourish—"They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." This is to shew the permanency of their principles—and to distinguish them from natural productions—

"The plants of grace shall ever live;
Nature decays, but grace must thrive;
Time, that doth all things else impair,
Still makes them flourish strong and fair."

The believer does not escape all the effects of years. The eye may grow dim; the ear become dull of hearing. But as the outward man perisheth, the inward man is renewed day by day. The young Christian is lovely, like a tree in the blossoms of spring: the aged Christian is valuable, like a tree in autumn, bending with ripe fruit. We therefore look for something superior in old disciples. More deadness to

the world, the vanity of which they have had more opportunities to see—more meekness of wisdom—more disposition to make sacrifices for the sake of peace—more maturity of judgment in divine things—more confidence in God—more richness of experience.

He also tells us *why* he shall flourish—"They shall be fat and flourishing, to shew that the Lord is upright." We might rather have supposed that it was necessary to shew that *they* were upright. But by the grace of God they are what they are—not they, but the grace of God which is in them. From *him* is their fruit found. Their preservation and fertility, therefore, are to the praise and glory of God; and, as what he does for them he had *engaged* to do, it displays his truth as well as his mercy, and proves that he is upright. This cleaving also to him with purpose of heart, and not turning away from him, whatever temptations the world presents—shews that they had found him to be what he had given himself out to be, and what they had taken him to be. Had he deceived or disappointed them, they would have forsaken him. But he has always dealt well with them—he has surpassed their hopes. They therefore love their Master and his work—and are willing to follow him to prison or to death—to shew that he is upright.

David, therefore, attests this from his own experience—"Let every one speak as he finds. I cannot but magnify his Name. I cannot but recommend him to those who want a dependence that will not give way. I have tried him, and tried him much, and long. I never served him for nought. I never called upon him in vain. I never trusted in him,

and was confounded—HE IS MY ROCK; AND THERE IS NO UNRIGHTEOUSNESS IN HIM.”

NOVEMBER 25.—EVENING.

“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” JOHN ix. 35.

THE question concerns us, as well as the man who had been restored to sight. And it admits of solution. Indeed, the inquiry would be absurd if an answer were impossible. Some very mistaken notions are entertained of divine influence. One thing is undeniable. The grace of God, in renewing us, engages and employs us; so that we are not like wood and stone, under the operation of the saw and chisel, merely passive, insensible, unconscious. God does not work upon us, but in us; and in us, to *will* and to *do* of his good pleasure. He is the author of repentance, by enabling *us* to exercise repentance—And cannot a man know whether he repents of any course or action in which he has been engaged? He is the giver of faith, as he teaches and aids *us* to believe. The faith, therefore, does not act in us like a charm. It is not a mysterious, unintelligible thing, of which we can give no account—We are always to be ready to give a reason of the hope that is in us.

How then is an answer to be returned? Let us away with accidental occurrences, and dreams, and sudden impulses; and repair to the Scriptures at once; and, by their decisions, examine ourselves whether we be in the faith, and prove our ourselves. Three evidences may be adduced of our believing on the Son of God.

First. Much anxiousness and uneasiness concerning it; in distinction from the temper of those who

can readily and easily take it for granted. This is not the disposition of awakened souls. *They* find how hard it is to abound and rejoice in hope. This results from the importance and dearness of the object. It is not true that it is easy to believe what we wish—Yea, in proportion as we love and value a thing, we become the more apprehensive, and require every kind of proof and assurance concerning its safety. And here the case is interesting beyond all comparison.—It is to ascertain my claims to everlasting life! What if I should be mistaken! And my heart is deceitful above all things, as well as desperately wicked! And I learn, from the word of truth, that many are imposed upon to their remediless ruin! And what if I am informed, but not enlightened!—convinced, but not converted!—almost, but not altogether a Christian! No wonder, in such a case, solitudes often revive; and the prayer be daily made, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.” Let me not be ashamed of my hope. These doubts and fears are a token for good; and may be compared to smoke—which indeed is not fire, but proves its existence, and is never found where it is not.

Secondly. The estimation in which we hold the Saviour. Hence says the Apostle, “To you therefore that believe, he is precious.” He does not say how precious—this would have been impossible. But faith makes him more precious to the soul than sight is to the eye, or melody to the ear; or food to the hungry; or health and life to the sick and the dying. Oh! says the believer, when I see him as he is revealed in the Word—when I see him in all I want—when I see how he became my Saviour—that when he was rich, for my sake he was made

poor; and died, that I might live—when I know that he is remembering me still, now he is come into his kingdom; appearing in the presence of God for me; and making all things to work together for my good—how can I but exclaim, Thou art fairer than the children of men!—His name must be as ointment poured forth—His cause must lie near my heart—I must dedicate myself to his service. I must hourly ask, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

“My God! and can a humble child,
That loves thee with a flame so high,
Be ever from thy face exiled,
Without the pity of thine eye?

“Impossible!—for thine own hands
Have tied my heart so fast to thee—
And in thy book the promise stands—
That where thou art thy friends must be.’

Thirdly. A life of obedience. Without this, an orthodox creed; the clearest knowledge; high confidence; much talking of divine things; great zeal for a party, will all in vain be called in to denominate you believers in Christ. Nothing can be more certain than that as a man is not wise who calls himself so, while all his conduct proclaims him a fool; and as *he* is not a benefactor who never gives—unless, indeed, words—so, *he* is not a believer who thinks and professes himself to be such; but he who acts and lives as such. We read of the work of faith—Where is this operation? By faith Noah built an ark. By faith Abraham left his own country, and his father’s house. Read the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews; and see whether faith is a mere notion, or a vital principle. “As the body

without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can such faith save him?" Therefore says James, "Shew me thy faith without thy works"—shew me a sun that never shines; a fire that never burns; a fountain that never flows—"and I will shew thee my faith by my works"—I will shew thee the spring in the streams; the cause in the effects; the principle in the practice. Though faith can alone justify the soul, works can alone justify faith, and prove it to be of the operation of God.

NOVEMBER 26.—MORNING.

"My people have forgotten their resting-place." JER. i. 6.

GOD has provided every creature he has made with some convenient good, in the possession of which it reposes. Natural bodies have their proper places, towards which they are carried, and declare, by resting in them, that they are where they ought to be. Sensitive beings are led towards sensitive, and animal beings towards animal indulgence, as agreeable to their nature; and these look no farther. But God himself is the resting-place of man: and it has justly been remarked, that herein lies man's excellency; that he alone, of all creatures in this lower world, was made capable of communion with his Maker; and designed for it; and being designed for it, and made capable of it, he is necessarily unsatisfied and restless without it. For though he has been turned away from God by sin, he retains the same natural

relation to God as his end; so that he can enjoy no true repose, till he meets with God again. He feels not only sentiments of misery, but of grandeur; and whatever may be employed to quiet and content him, will be found perfectly inadequate; and from every fruitless experiment to supply the immense cravings of a fallen, yet immortal mind, he will ever be asking, "Who will shew us any good?"

There was a time when the "people of God" themselves attempted to live without him in the world. But they were dead while they lived. They were strangers to every thing like satisfaction, till they happily inquired, "Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" But since they sought and found him, they have been able to make their boast in the Lord—"The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him." "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. *He*, therefore, is *their* resting-place" actually; and by conviction; and choice; and enjoyment. And what a resting-place is he! There is no repose like that which we possess in him—It is a peace that passeth all understanding. How then can it be described? Who can express the blessedness of viewing him as our own God, in the covenant of his dear Son—ready to pardon—able to enlighten, to renew, to support, to defend—presiding over all our affairs, and making the most adverse events conduce to our welfare—and promising, on oath, that his grace shall be sufficient for us; and that he will supply all our need from his

riches in glory, by Christ Jesus! All we can do is to invite others to come, and learn (it is the only way to know) by experience—"O taste and see that the Lord is good! blessed is the man that trusteth in him." Incomparable as this resting-place is, it is equally secure and durable. Nothing can destroy it; nothing can injure it; nothing can invade it. We live in the midst of uncertainty and change; but the Lord changes not. There is therefore something sure; something lasting—It is that very one thing, O Christian! upon which thou hast laid all thy hope; and from which thou drawest all thy comfort—The eternal God is thy refuge; and underneath are the everlasting arms.

And yet they are charged with *forgetting* their resting-place. The charge cannot be taken without limitation. As fainting is not death; and as back-sliding is not apostacy; so this forgetfulness is not constant and total. But it cannot be denied that it is occasional and partial. Our ingratitude shews it. This is at once the effect and the proof of our forgetfulness of God; and is therefore expressed by it—"Thou hast forgotten the God that formed thee." It sometimes appears with regard to the means of *grace*. In proportion as we feel our need of *him*, we shall value *them*; because it is in these that God is to be found and enjoyed—Hence it is said, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." But we may read the Scriptures less than we did—and be less alone—and less regardful of the Sabbath—and suffer excuses to keep us from the sanctuary that once would have had no influence over us. It shews itself in our looking to ourselves for what we want; when in the Lord we have righteousness and strength; and from

him is our fruit found. We betray it in our creature dependence. Instead of committing our way unto the Lord, and waiting patiently for him, we weary ourselves for very vanity, in running from creature to creature for help; and learn by our folly and suffering, that our strength is to sit still: "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."—And do we not forget him when we faint in the day of adversity? "Oh!" says one, "if such a comfort was removed, mine eye would no more see good." "Oh!" says another, "my loss is irreparable; my wound is incurable." We do not wish you to be insensible, or to undervalue your deprivations: but is it a lamp, or the sun of which you have been deprived? David, in the desolations of Ziklag, did not forget his resting-place—"Then David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Our regard to the world will also shew our regard to God. We forget him just in proportion as the world strikes and allures us—In sight of him it can do nothing with us. But where is the spring, when we stoop to the puddle? Are not the consolations of God small with us when we repair to worldly attractions and delights?

But the charge is too obvious to require proof—and every Christian will readily confess,

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;
Prone to leave the God I love."

Yet how humiliating is the fact! And how wonderful, too! "Can a maid forget her ornaments? or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number," "who am their beauty, their glory; all their salvation and all their desire."

How little would they themselves have supposed this possible when they first returned to him : from darkness to light ; from bondage to liberty ; from a wilderness to the garden of the Lord ! “ Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.” And still, after renewed manifestations, and under lively impressions, they are often ready to think they can never be the same dull and ungrateful creatures they have often been—

“ When my forgetful soul renews
The savour of thy grace,
My heart presumes, I cannot lose
The relish all my days.

“ But, ere one fleeting hour is past,
The flattering world employs
Some sensual bait to seize my taste,
And to pollute my joys.

“ Wretch that I am, to wander thus,
In chase of false delight !
Let me be fasten'd to thy cross,
Rather than lose the sight !

“ Make haste, my days, to reach the goal,
And bring my soul to rest
On the dear centre of my soul—
My God, my Saviour's breast.”

NOVEMBER 26.—EVENING.

“ I shall be satisfied.” PSALM xvi. 15.

THE Lord's people are not strangers to satisfaction now. We read of their being satisfied early with his

favour; satisfied with his goodness; abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house. But this is true only in degree: that is, they are satisfied, compared with what others feel, and with what they themselves once felt. They have found the supreme good, and they desire nothing beyond it—But they desire more of it—They long to know their Lord and Saviour more clearly, to resemble him more fully, to enjoy him more entirely. David therefore speaks of his satisfaction as future; and not only mentions the source of it—"I will behold thy face in righteousness"—but fixes the period: "I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness."

Here we see—shall I say—the insatiable ambition religion inspires? What an enlargement of views and feelings do the subjects of Divine grace experience! so that they not only pass by as beneath their attention what mortals idolize, but soar beyond all that God himself has done for them here, content with nothing short of his full vision and likeness in heaven; keeping on the wing, and continuing all manner of search, till they reach a rest and a prize so distant and so infinite! And we have witnessed this grandeur and elevation of soul, even in the humblest walks of pious life. The rude mechanic and the illiterate ploughman, though incapable of constructing the poetry, have felt all the sentiment of the poet—

"He by himself hath sworn,
I on his oath depend;
I shall, on eagle wings upborne,
To heaven ascend;
I shall behold his face,
I shall his power adore;
And sing the wonders of his love
For evermore."

How mean-spirited are the aims and taste of the worldly hero and philosopher, compared with this!

Here we behold the excellency of the soul. It is the prerogative of man only to be capable of such sublime satisfaction. But he was made for it; and his destination explains the enigma he now presents. Detached from this prospect, his greatness would be inexplicable. He would seem a vessel freighted, at an incalculable expense, for an important enterprise, and, as if designed to sail an immense voyage, only to cruise a few leagues and a few days, and then founder and be lost. Other creatures have a good suited to their nature, and they partake of it, and look no further, but are satisfied. Is man satisfied? He has faculties which carry him beyond the limits of his condition. He has an imagination which nothing can realize. He feels desires and expectations which nothing fulfils. He is struck with novelty, and pleased with diversions: but these, after a while, lose their charm; and by the time he has reached sixty or seventy, he seems to have run his round, and feels an ennui irksome and intolerable, unless he is animated by the spirit of our text. This would explain, and relieve, and enliven all, by shewing him that the present is only the threshold of existence; that he is now only in a state of instruction and discipline; that nothing is designed to detain him here; that this is only a passage to the home of his heart and his portion for ever.

But what a view does it give us of this blessedness, that it *can*, that it *will*, satisfy every longing of the soul itself! Here two things will serve additionally to enhance its greatness. Our capacities will be amazingly enlarged hereafter to what they now

are. Men who have put away childish things require far more to satisfy them than is necessary for infants. We should think highly of any thing that would satisfy such minds as Newton's and Bacon's. But the least in the kingdom of heaven will be greater than they. Then we must think of the duration of the pleasure. Many things will satisfy for a while: but here are thousands of ages to be provided for. What discoveries and employments, what acquisitions and enjoyments, must those be, which will yield undecaying satisfaction for ever and ever!

What do you think of this? Is not such a prospect inviting? Does any thing here satiate the hunger and thirst of the mind? Do you not feel vanity in every success, as well as vexation of spirit in every disappointment? Yet this is your best condition—It is all the happiness you will know if you die out of Christ. You will then awake; but it will be to know the reality of the blessedness of which we speak—to know that you have lost it—lost it for ever—and lost it for nothing. You will therefore awake to everlasting shame and contempt.

But as for you, ye heirs of glory! turn the prospect of this satisfaction to your advantage. For which purpose—First, make it sure. Secondly, keep it clear. Thirdly, bring it near. Fourthly, use it daily. Carry it into your religious duties; it will enliven you. Carry it into your trials; it will sustain you. Carry it into the valley of the shadow of death; it will comfort you. A notion formerly prevailed that if a man travelled with a myrtle wand in his hand, he would feel no fainting or weariness. Here is the reality of the fiction—This hope is the true

myrtle staff. Take it constantly along with you ; and you will renew your strength—you will run, and not be weary ; and walk, and not faint.

NOVEMBER 27.—MORNING.

"Faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." 1 TIM. i. 14.

THESE two are often spoken of in the Scriptures. And, if we observe the passages in which they occur, and especially the words of the Apostle John—"This is his commandment, that we believe on the name of his Son, and love one another;" we shall see, that the first regards Christ, and the second, our brethren.

But let us remark their order. Faith is placed before love—and this is the case, without any exception, whenever they are coupled together by the sacred writers. And there is reason for it. The order of the words is the order of the things. Faith precedes all true obedience. It necessarily goes before repentance—I cannot grieve for what I have done, unless I believe I have done amiss ; and I cannot sorrow after a godly sort, unless I look on him whom I have pierced, and mourn for *him*. Faith is a radical principle. It is the root of the tree ; and all the rest is branch, blossom, and fruit. It is the spring, from which every thing else in religion flows as a stream. Love does not produce faith ; but faith, love.

Yet there is a connexion between them ; and their union is also as invariably expressed as their order.

In truth, they are inseparable. Is it conceivable, that when such a scheme as Christianity gets into the soul, it can lie there dead, or even asleep? Is it not compared to a well of water, springing up into everlasting life? to a fire, that converts every thing combustible into its own nature? to leaven hid in meal, that leavens the whole lump? Observe all the believers, who, in the Scripture, encompass us as a great cloud of witnesses. Was their faith a notion? a profession? a form of godliness without the power? Could *such* faith have saved them? True faith overcomes the world. It purifies the heart. And it works by love. It does not indeed work by love exclusively. It works by hatred, when it regards sin; and by fear, when it regards danger—So Noah, by faith, being warned of God, was moved with fear. But love is the disposition the Gospel peculiarly requires. It is the end of the commandment, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. It also is pre-eminently suited to produce it. What is God? God is love. From what principle did he act in our salvation? God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. And if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. What do we see in the life and death of the Saviour but divine compassion embodied? a love that passeth knowledge? And what is the inference? "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering, and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour."

Let us not pass over this. Some people's faith

seems to work by selfishness, censoriousness, wrath, malice, and all uncharitableness. But we have no reason to conclude that we have "the faith of God's elect," unless, "as the elect of God, holy and beloved, we put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

It is lamentable to think, how many of our fellow-creatures are destitute of these graces. Art thou, O my soul! a stranger to the influence of this faith and love? Let me remember, that they are infinitely important and indispensable—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death."

But shall I be satisfied with the reality of this faith and love, regardless of the degree? How desirable—how necessary—how attainable is more of their vital prevalency! Let me resemble the Thessalonians; of whom the Apostle could say, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all towards each other aboundeth."

NOVEMBER 27.—EVENING.

"He knoweth the way that I take." Job xiii. 10.

THIS, under the dark and distressing dispensation with which he was exercised, afforded Job relief and

satisfaction—The knowledge of his covenant God and Father: "*He* knoweth the way that I take." But what are to we understand by this knowledge? Acquaintance and approbation.

First, acquaintance. So he knoweth the way that his people take; and so he knoweth also the way that others take. But *they* do not deem this a privilege: yea, it is an irksome and fearful reflection; and therefore, instead of having recourse to it for consolation, *they* endeavour to banish it from their minds. "For he that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd." "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light." He feels pleasure in the thought, "Thou, God, seest me." Not that he is so vain and ignorant as to imagine that he can bear censureless the gaze of Omniscience; far from it: he is conscious that God will see much that is amiss in him—but he is conscious too, that God himself will see nothing wrong in him which he does not wish to have rectified. "I must be cured; and *he* alone can heal me: and therefore I rejoice that his knowledge prepares him to deal unerringly with me; and therefore I can pray, See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

And as this relieves him with regard to his experience, so it comforts him with regard to his outward condition and circumstances in the world. He telleth all my wanderings. He knoweth all my walking through this great wilderness. He sees all my dangers, and can defend and guide me. I know not the way that I take; but *he* knoweth it: and my welfare depends upon *his* knowledge, not mine. He is now bringing the blind by a way that they know

not, and is leading them in paths that they have not known; and he *will* make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight: these things will he do unto them, and not forsake them. All is now perfectly clear to him; and I can trust him when he says, *And thou shalt know hereafter.*

There is also another case. "Am I misunderstood by friends, and reproached by enemies, while acting conscientiously and uprightly? How pleasing is it to turn from creatures so liable to err, and appeal to him who searcheth the heart, and discerns our motives and aims! My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high." "Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal"—"He knoweth the way that I take."

Secondly, approbation. Thus "he knoweth the way of the righteous;" but does not know the way of the ungodly. "For the way of the ungodly shall perish;" he "is angry with the wicked every day." But if any man love God, the same is known of him. The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him. The words of their mouths, and the meditations of their hearts, are acceptable in his sight. And that Job here peculiarly intends approbation is obvious from the words which follow: "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips: I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." So confesses the Church: "All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps de-

cluded from thy way; though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death." And says David, "For I am become like a bottle in the smoke, yet do I not forget thy statutes." And it is well when in our sufferings we can approve ourselves unto God. You are not, says Peter, to suffer as evil-doers, but as Christians; and therefore he adds, "Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." Jacob had this satisfaction when he was returning from Padan-aram, and had to meet his infuriated brother: he could therefore plead, "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." Thy word has brought me into this strait; and therefore I have a gracious right to rely upon thy care for safety and deliverance. It was otherwise with Elijah when he fled from the face of Jezebel, and concealed himself in the cave at Horeb; and therefore says God, "What dost thou here, Elijah?" He was unable to frame an answer that did not reflect upon his own fear and distrust; and had not God dealt with him better than he deserved, he would have found that the turning away of the simple slays them.

But, whatever be our state and circumstances, let us seek the testimony that we please God; and labour that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. What can sustain and animate like this? "Let them curse, but bless thou."

NOVEMBER 28.—MORNING

"Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long."

PROV. xxiii. 17.

THE mistake of many persons is, that they view religion as something separate from common life; and which can hardly be made to agree with it. But we are to render every thing not only consistent with godliness, but even a part of it. If Gaius was to bring friends on their way, it was to be done so as to render it not only an act of civility, but of piety—It was to be done "after a godly sort." "On Thee," says David, "do I wait all the day." And Solomon enjoins us to be "in the fear of the Lord all the day long." The day, here, is to be taken, not abstractedly, as a mere period of duration, but in reference to its concerns. There are several things, into contact with which we may expect to come every day. Let us see how the fear of the Lord will influence us with regard to each of them.

First. It will influence us as to the devotions of the day. If there be an opportunity of repairing to the house of God, and hearing his word, it will dispose us to avail ourselves of it; and so to regulate our affairs as to be able to attend. It will produce morning and evening worship at the family altar. It will also lead us to enter our closets. The principle also will not only excite us to the performance of devotion, but aid us *in* it. It will throw off mere formality, or cause us to mourn over our want of spirituality and life.

Secondly. It will influence us as to the business of the day. It will require us to have some pro-

fession or calling in which we are to be employed; and in this it will induce us to be diligent. An idle man cannot be under the power of religion; and he lies open to temptation. It will also make us conscientious: governing ourselves by the fair rules of trade; not having divers weights and measures; or different kinds of goods and prices, for friends or strangers, the knowing or the ignorant. It will allow us to aim at lawful advantage: but it will regulate and moderate our desire of gain. It will make us content with subsistence and competency, without wealth and independence—"He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent." It will make us feel our reliance upon God for his blessing, without which we may rise early and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows. Upon the same principle, it will make us grateful for success; and keep us from burning incense to our own net, and sacrificing to our own drag.

Thirdly. It will influence us as to the relaxations of the day. These we need. Who could bear unceasing, unbending drudgery? The machine would soon be worn out by perpetual friction. All indulgences are not innocent. We shall therefore avoid those that would stain the mind, and wound the conscience, and unfit us for prayer. We shall shun expensive entertainments. The most agreeable and useful recreations are the cheapest. And who can ever be at a loss for these, if they will follow nature, instead of fashion? And we shall indulge in none to excess; especially excess as to time. Of time we must always be frugal. Like the swallow, we must skim the water as we fly; or, like Gideon's followers, we must, in our pursuit, lap with

the hand, rather than kneel down. The fear of the Lord will make us always watchful, with regard to *indulgence*—and *especially* in things lawful; for here we are most liable to be ensnared. God giveth us all things to enjoy: but we are not to feast ourselves without fear.

Fourthly. It will influence us as to the company of the day. Are we called to intermix with the wicked? We shall walk in wisdom towards them that are without. We shall endeavour to render our religion not only impressive, but attractive. We shall keep our mouth as with a bridle; or, if we speak, it will be a word in season. Do we meet with pious connexions? We shall feel towards them as brethren. We shall speak of the things touching the King. We shall not offend against the generation of the upright. Among our immediate relations, and in our family circle, we shall let the Christian appear, and maintain our consistency. If we rebuke, it will be in the spirit of love. We shall not threaten, but rather entreat. Our religion will be seen much oftener than it is heard; and we shall expect to succeed, not so much by direct effort, as by keeping our charge constantly under the exhibition of whatsoever things are lovely and of good report.

Finally. It will influence us as to the trials of the day. It will not fill us with forebodings, and prevent our enjoying the present comforts of Providence; but it will keep us from forgetting that this is a vale of tears, or thinking it strange if we are called to endure. It will teach us to look beyond instruments—to see and own the hand of God in our afflictions—to inquire wherefore he contendeth with

us—to implore grace, not only to support, but to sanctify: and to enable us to honour God, and edify others, by our sufferings—and, avoiding all improper means to escape from trouble, not only hope, but quietly wait, for the salvation of God.

A concern to exemplify all this, is the best evidence of our religion. It is the way of safety, and honour, and advantage. The eye of God is upon us all the day long. He is doing us good all the day long. We may die all the day long—Let us therefore be in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

NOVEMBER 28.—EVENING.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”

EPHES. i. 3.

THERE is a correspondence observable between God and his people; or, so to speak, a spiritual flux and reflux from God to them, and from them to God. He chooses them, and they choose him. He sanctifies them, and they sanctify him. He glorifies them, and they glorify him.

Thus, in the words before us, we have grace for grace, and blessing for blessing. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” All our happiness and duty are found in this circulation. If God does not bless us, we are miserable; if we do not bless God, we are criminal.

Yet there is a great difference between these bene

dictions. His blessing us precedes our blessing him and we love him because he first loved us. His blessing us is a real communication; and the Apostle characterizes the benefits which it bestows four ways: by their quality; by their plenitude; by their residence; and by their relation—He blesses us with “spiritual” blessings; with “all” spiritual blessings; with all spiritual blessings “in heavenly places;” with “all” spiritual blessings in heavenly places “in Christ.” But our blessing of God can add nothing to his perfection. Our goodness extendeth not to him. He is exalted above all blessing and praise. Yet we can praise him declaratively; and he that offereth praise glorifieth him.

The soul of this is gratitude. Gratitude has been defined as a disposition to return a favour received. Towards man it may be thus expressed; it may be thus fully expressed; yea, more than an equivalency, or compensation, for a benefit has been often made: but in this manner it can never be expressed towards God. His goodness is infinite; and therefore our gratitude is to appear not in discharging our obligations, but in feeling them, and in a concern to make suitable returns while adequate ones are out of our power. Thus David asks, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?” And thus we bless him, not only verbally, but practically, and shew forth his praise, as it is beautifully expressed, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days.

Who does this? Who is not condemned by this subject? Instead of blessing God we are senseless

or silent. Instead of abundantly uttering the memory of his great goodness, we are murmurers and complainers. Suffer the clamour of a few trials to drown the voice of a thousand mercies—Yet Paul had suffered the loss of all things, and was even a prisoner when *he* used this glowing language; “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us all with spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”

We are backward to all religious exercises, but even selfishness may make us attentive to other duties. Compelled by our necessities, we pray; we call upon our Benefactor in the day of trouble; but when we have gained our purpose, we soon forget his works, and the wonders which he has shewn us. Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Even Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done him, for his heart was lifted up. Who can reflect upon this, and not exclaim, “O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”

Let me then lay down three rules, by observing which we shall experience and express more of this blessed and blessing temper of mind.

First. Labour to ascertain your own interest in Divine things. Seek the full assurance of hope unto the end. Oh! when I can view the blessings revealed in the Gospel as *my* portion, when “I can read *my* title clear to mansions in the skies,” when I can draw near to God as *my* exceeding joy, then all the powers of gratitude are touched; then all its springs are opened; then, by the mercies of God, I present my body as a living sacrifice; then I say, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.

Secondly. Often and carefully consider your mercies. Nothing can affect us but as it is in our thoughts. Therefore forget not all his benefits. Make them pass and repass in your reviews. Dwell upon the evils from which you have been delivered, the provisions with which you have been fed, the robes with which you have been adorned—Once a slave, now redeemed; once guilty, now justified from all things; once a child of wrath, now an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. Ebenezer! Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Thirdly. Gain and preserve a growing sense of your unworthiness. There is an inseparable connexion between humility and gratitude. A proud man was never known to be grateful. Heap therefore whatever favours you please upon him, and what thanks have ye? And the reason is, because he thinks he deserves your kindness, and that you are doing justly rather than shewing mercy. But he who is sensible that he is not worthy of the least indulgence will feel obliged by every attention. And what is the fact with regard to us? We are not only mean, but criminal. For proof of this we need not go back to the days of unregeneracy. What have we been since we have known God, or rather have been known of him? Let us look at our omissions of duty, our misimprovement of privileges, our debasements of motive; the sins of our holy things. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed! Yet we are in the possession of grace! And in the prospect of glory!

NOVEMBER 29.—MORNING.

"This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment."
1 JOHN iii. 23.

THE *injunction* of the latter of these has given rise to no difficulty. But much dispute has been occasioned by the *commanding* of the former. It is undeniable, however, that the one is enjoined as well as the other—in the same passage, and—by the very same authority. He that commands us to love one another, commands us equally to believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.

And if so, then faith is a duty. Indeed, if it be not a duty, we are not bound to obey God. If it be not a duty, unbelief is not a sin. Yet the Holy Ghost convinces us of sin—and of sin, because we believe not on Christ. Accordingly, in conviction, with the discovery of *this* guilt, we are principally affected; and look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn for him. Hence, unbelief is punishable, and destroys the soul. Indeed, nothing else destroys the soul, under the Gospel. For provision is there made for our fallen condition, and pressed upon our acceptance; but we neglect so great salvation; and turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.—It is true, Divine influence is necessary. But why is it not possessed? If there be any truth in the Bible—it is *sinful to be without it*. But why should we seek after, or be thankful for, assistance to enable us to do what *we were under no obligation to do!*

This justifies ministers, in calling upon sinners to believe. There are some who condemn and ridicule

them for this. But Ezekiel, in the name of God, prophesied to the dry bones, and said unto *them*—“Live.” Paul made no scruple to admonish Simon Magus, though in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity, to repent and pray. And to the Jailer he said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou *shalt* be saved—for he *then* was not.

As the love of God renders our duty our privilege; so the authority of God renders our privilege our duty. And is not this an advantage? For thus we are not left to the calls of self-love, and our own interest; but are bound to pursue our welfare by the command of God, and the peril arising from a neglect of it.

This also meets the state of the conscience, and affords encouragement to awakened sinners. These, under a sense of their unworthiness and guilt, will be sure to ask—“But *may* I go to him, and trust in him? What *warrant* have I?” Now here is the warrant—the command of God. I may doubt my title to a promise; but I cannot question my obligation to obey a Divine command. This fully authorizes me—Yea, it not only secures me from presumption if I comply, but renders me chargeable with disobedience if I refuse. I am not afraid to love another. I never inquire, *may* I do it? I know that I ought to do it; because he has commanded it. Why then should I fear to apply to the Saviour?—And why ask, *May* I believe on him to life everlasting?—since this also is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.

Lord, I believe—help thou mine unbelief.

NOVEMBER 29.—EVENING.

"A partner." PHILEMON 17.

THE whole verse reads thus: "If thou count me therefore, a partner, receive him as myself." In this argument, on the behalf of Onesimus, Paul does not employ his authority or plead his apostleship. He does not describe himself from his extraordinary commission and endowments, but calls himself "a partner" with Philemon in the mutual interests of Christianity. John also speaks much in the same way when he refers to himself: "I, John, am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ."

As Paul here speaks of himself as a Christian, under the character of "a partner," we are led to observe that all Christians are thus related to each other.

There are partners in business. This does not wholly apply to the case before us. The salvation of our own souls is an individual and a personal concern; and is carried on between God and ourselves. Others may do some things for us; but as they cannot eat, and drink, and sleep for us, so they cannot repent, and believe, and obey for us. Here the heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with his joy. He that is wise is profitable to himself; and shall have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. Yet there is a common concern in which all Christians are jointly and equally engaged. It is, to serve and glorify God by maintaining his cause in the world, and by endeavouring to enlarge his empire and multiply the number of his followers. This does not require them to live toge-

ther in the same place or to labour in the same way; but they are bound to co-operate in the use of all the means in their power to advance the same end—abiding with God in their callings—having gifts differing according to the proportion of faith—and faithful as stewards of the manifold grace of God—each aiming to be accepted of him.

But there are partners in privileges, and this applies entirely to Christians. They are all “partakers of the benefit.” “Partakers of Christ.” They “are all one in Christ Jesus.” Jude speaks of “the common salvation;” and we read of our being called by God “into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” We read also of “the fellowship of his sufferings,” by which we understand an equal right to all the blessings derived from his cross,—reconciliation, redemption, justification, and sanctification. In the ministrations of the word, the ordinances of religion, the influences and comforts of the Holy Ghost, we have fellowship one with another, and are heirs together of the grace of life.

This partnership may be judged of by the privileges they share in. These privileges are distinguished by four characters. They are spiritual in their nature. They are inestimable in their value. They are free—without money and without price in their bestowment. And they are in their possession secure from loss and injury—“the sure mercies of David.”

Am I a partner? There is not a better evidence in your favour than your anxious concern to determine this; and your being able to say with Paul—the partner here spoken of, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; that I may win Christ and be found in

him." David also could say, "Thou hast given me the heritage of them that fear thy name;" and how was it with him? What was *his* prayer? "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance."

And if you are a partner, how should this encourage and comfort you, that in all your obscurity and affliction you have "the communion of saints"—an interest—an equal interest with all the blessed of the Lord, whether on earth or in heaven, in all the enjoyments, riches, and glories which constitute their portion for ever!

And should you not be concerned to bring in others to share with you? Surely there is enough and to spare. Your claim will not be diminished by an increase of partakers. Yea, your happiness will be augmented by it, if you are likeminded with angels—for they rejoice over every sinner that repenteth. So the first Christians, who had drunk so immediately at the spring-head of benevolence and love, could not keep the blessedness to themselves: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

NOVEMBER 30.—MORNING.

"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" JOHN ix. 35.

WHOEVER thou art that readest this page, allow the writer to address this question to **THEE**.

Art thou *young*—Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Oh that you did! How the Scripture extols and recommends early godliness! They that seek me early, says the Saviour, shall find me—find me—for there is an emphasis in the promise; find me, as others never will, never can, find me—find me in a thousand peculiar preservations, honours, advantages, and delights. And what a favourable season do you now enjoy!—the body in health and strength—the mind in vigour—the memory retentive—the affections warm, the heart tender—the cares and troubles of life scarcely begun—the days distant in which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them!” Oh! redeem the time. Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Enter immediately a course that is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

Art thou *old*—Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Thy age requires respect; and I readily pay it—But thy state demands all my fidelity. And art thou, at the end of sixty, seventy, eighty years, ignorant of the Redeemer, whom to know is life eternal? Have all these departed seasons been passed only in vanity and vice? Is thy day rapidly closing; and thy work, thy journey, not even begun? Does thine eye, in looking back, meet with nothing but guilt; and, in looking forward, nothing but gloom? How I pity thy condition! It is time—it is high time to awake out of sleep. And, blessed be God, it is not too late. I announce a Saviour who is able to save unto the uttermost; and who converted and pardoned the thief at the eleventh hour—Oh! seek him while he may be found; and call upon him while he is near.—But if thou art old in grace, as

well as in age, thy hoary head, being found in the way of righteousness, is a crown of glory. And thy salvation is nearer than when thou believedst. The night, with thee, is far spent, and the day is at hand. Yet a little while, and what a blessed deliverance! What a glorious elevation! Till then, let faith and patience have their perfect work. Recommend his service to others, from your own knowledge of its excellency. Take a fresh and firmer hold of him, from the proofs you have had of his faithfulness and care: and, leaning upon his arm, as you descend, say—

“By long experience, I have known
Thy sovereign power to save;
At thy command I venture down
Securely to the grave.”

Art thou *indulged* by providence? Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God? Perhaps sickness led you down to the very gates of death; and you looked into eternity; and, without hope in that world, you trembled, and cried, Take me not off in the midst of my days; spare me that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more. And he heard your cry; and said, Return again, ye children of men. And have you returned again to folly? And have you forgotten that the vows of God are upon you? And what is a recovered body while the soul is full of moral disease? And reprieve, too, is not a pardon. Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. Is the sentence still suspended? and the delayed execution will be attended with added terror and remorse. Perhaps thy business flourishes; thy grounds bring forth plenti-

fully; thy cup runneth over. We do not wish you to despise the bounties of Nature and Providence; yea, you ought to be thankful for them. As to their use, they are valuable; but what are they as a *portion*? How melancholy is the thought that you must leave them! And you know not how soon you may be torn from all your treasure. And, even in the midst of your fulness, are you not in straits? Do you not sigh over your very enjoyments? Does not success, as well as disappointment, tell you that this is not your rest? Ah! these failures of hope, these inward uneasinesses, are the inspirations of the Almighty to give you understanding. They are designed to turn you from creatures, which are all vanity and vexation of spirit, to a Saviour, who is full of grace and truth. Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.

Art thou the subject of *affliction*? Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God? To be poor in the world, and be destitute of the true riches; to have no friend below, and no God above; to pass from the sorrows of time into a more miserable eternity—is a state so dreadful, that every feeling of benevolence must be concerned to find a resource for its victims. And such we are happy enough to be able to open. There is the hope of Israel; the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble. His Gospel is sent to bind up the broken-hearted. Perhaps you are at your wits' end—Perhaps you are ready to curse the day of your birth—Perhaps you are tempted to destroy yourself. Beware of Satan's relief. Beware of a cure that will be far worse than the disease. And you need it not. There is one near you whom you

know not. He is now stretching forth his soft hand ; he is now saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This man shall be the peace when the Assyrian cometh into the land.

Art thou a *professor of religion*? Dost thou believe on the Son of God? "Why should you address the inquiry to me? Had not the Church been satisfied with my character, and deemed me a believer, they would not have admitted me to their communion." But they might have been mistaken. They could only judge from outward appearance ; and it became them to be candid. There is no certainty from this quarter.—"But if I had not hoped that I was a real believer in Jesus, I should not have proposed myself as a member of a Christian Church, and have come to the Lord's Table, where I should have eaten and drunken unworthily. Why, then, do you suspect me?" My friend—I do not suspect you ; but I love you ; and love, though not suspicious, is cautious. As mistakes are possible, and common, it cannot be improper for you to examine yourself, and prove whether you are in the faith. If the house be built upon the sand, it is well to know it before the storm comes. But if it be built on the rock, the discovery will yield fresh satisfaction ; and you will be encouraged to say—"I know whom I have believed ; and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

Or art thou a *real Christian*? Dost thou believe on the Son of God? "I know that thou believest." Yet, as pride blends with the humility of the most humble, and impatience with the resignation of the

most patient, even so, as an old writer says, how unbelieving are the best believers! When our Saviour had expressed himself more fully and clearly, his disciples exclaimed, "Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God." Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? You think so: but imagination is not reality. I know you better than you know yourselves. And you yourselves, in a little time, will see that you have much less faith than you now profess — "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." All—all may cry out with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

NOVEMBER 30.—EVENING.

"This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed."

GEN. v. 29.

THIS leads us back to the malediction denounced in consequence of sin—"And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground: for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Lamech, who here com

plains of the ground, had been contemporary with Adam during more than fifty years; and therefore he had doubtless heard from him in what a happy condition man was originally placed in Eden, where indeed he dressed the garden, but without vexation or fatigue. How different from this delightful residence was the wide wilderness world in which he now was, where the spontaneous productions were only briars and thorns, while the good things he wished for could only be procured by wearisome efforts, and amidst frequent disappointments! Yet it seems strange that those who could settle wherever they chose, should talk of the difficulty of subsistence, and the hardships occasioned by the barrenness of the soil. Two things would contribute to this. They seem not to have been allowed animal food before the Flood; and therefore they depended for support entirely on the fruits of the earth. And they had not that skill in agriculture we have, nor many of those implements of husbandry which save and soften labour now. Men were therefore engrossed in the drudgery of clearing the soil from nuisances, turning it up by hand, fencing it off from beasts so numerous and near, manuring it, sowing it, reaping it, carrying it home, beating it out and preparing it for use under a thousand inconveniences—Lamech speaks like one weary of a life consumed not only in work, but *toil* to relieve the low wants of animal appetites—and having come in exhausted from the field, he takes up his new-born babe—and looking at the mother, calls “his name [so Noah signifies] refreshment, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.”

It is obvious from hence that he expected for himself and others some relief, rest, or consolation, from this child. What was it? And how is the expression to be understood?—"This same shall comfort us." First, we may take it as an emotion purely paternal. Lo! children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. It is therefore natural to rejoice at their birth. "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." Jeremiah speaks of the man that brought tidings to his father, saying, "a man child is born unto thee, thereby making his heart glad." And though children are certain cares and uncertain comforts, it seems—for the future is wisely concealed from our view—impossible for the parental heart not to indulge hopes as well as wishes. This same shall grow up into a pleasing companion—he shall continue our name and our family—he shall reward our expense and care by returns of gratitude and attention—and when we are old and grey-headed he shall be the stay and solace of age and infirmity. He may also increase the number of the faithful, and be a part of the seed which shall serve the Redeemer. We are nursing this child for God; and what joy will it afford us to see him an heir of glory, walking in the truth, and a blessing to all around him!

Secondly, as a prophetic intimation of Noah's usefulness. Though he spake according to his natural affection, we have reason to believe he spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. He therefore announces that this was to be an extraordinary

child; a deliverer; one who should serve his generation; and prove a benefactor to the human race. Accordingly he not only, as Jarchi says, improved agriculture much, and reduced human labour, and planted vineyards, and produced wine which strengthens man's heart; but he prepared an ark for the salvation of any who would avail themselves of it. In him the race of mankind was revived after the Deluge. He was the father of the new world, and from his loins the whole globe was peopled. For his sake the face of the earth was renewed, and an assurance and a pledge obtained, of its safety from drowning, and of its enjoying the regular succession of the seasons. All this Lamech here foretold, and much of it he lived to see realizing: for he lived after the birth of Noah five hundred and ninety-five years. He therefore saw his son not only good but great; and as he lived till within five years of the Deluge, he could see the ark nearly finished, and would often doubtless go down to the scene, and sit and lean upon his staff, and watch the workmen. Noah was also a preacher of righteousness, and heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Thirdly, as an evangelical reference to the Saviour. Why should this be deemed a thing incredible or improbable? Even in these early days an expectation prevailed, derived from the promise of the woman's seed in Paradise, of a Redeemer of the human race from the effects of the Fall; and many were raised up to hold him forth, imperfectly indeed, but really and usefully. God said to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This seed was, immediately, Isaac; but, finally and principally, the Messiah that should de-

scend from him. Abraham therefore derived his hope and consolation from him, whom his son preceded as his ancestor, and prefigured as a type. It was the same with Lamech. He predicts that in his seed the world would experience a greater deliverance than from the Flood; and that one, of whom Noah was only an emblem, should be raised up to bless us with all spiritual blessings, even Jesus, which delivers us from the wrath to come. Say not, this all-important event was then too far off—A thousand years with the Lord are as one day. Say not, it is improbable that Lamech was enlightened enough to be aware of this—The prophets were not acquainted with the degree and extent of their own communications: and therefore studied them after they had delivered them; “searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”

And, blessed be God, *we* know who is the true Noah. “His rest shall be glorious.” “Come unto me,” says he, “all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Let nothing divert us from him. “This is the rest wherewith ye shall cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing.” Come what will—“**THIS SAME SHALL COMFORT US.**”

DECEMBER 1.—MORNING.

“Doth Job fear God for naught?” Job 1. 9.

THESE are the words of Satan. Some deny the agency, and even the existence of such a being. But

the denial renders the language of the Scripture inexplicable and absurd. It also furnishes a proof of the fact itself: for the god of this world blindeth the minds of them that believe not.

These are the words of Satan—And let us not refuse to consider them, because *he* is the speaker. Truth is the same, whoever utters it.

“Seize upon truth, where'er 'tis found;
Among your friends, among your foes:
On Christian or on Heathen ground—
The flower's divine, where'er it grows:
Refuse the prickles, and assume the rose.”

Alluding to the Scribes, our Saviour said to his hearers, “Whatsoever they command you to observe, that observe ye: but do not after their works; for they say, and do not.”

These are the words of Satan—but though we should not refuse the truth, because it comes from *him*; yet it surely becomes us to examine whether what he says is truth; and also for what *purpose* he says it. For even truth may be misapplied and abused. It is thus Antinomians are so injurious: by the most precious doctrines of the Gospel, they turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and make Christ the minister of sin. In our Lord's temptation, Satan had a Bible with him, and turned to the passages; or he shewed a good memory for the Scripture, for he quoted it very readily. But it was for the vilest design.

Now it is easy to learn his meaning here. God had been extolling his servant Job—“The Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth: a perfect and an upright man; one that feareth God, and escheweth

evil?" Then Satan answered the Lord and said—"He is, I acknowledge, a worshipper of Thee! And no wonder. He has found it the way to grandeur and wealth. It has procured for him seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that he is the greatest man in the East. He has found godliness gain; and now makes gain godliness--Doth Job serve God for nought?"

Here we see how well Satan is called—the accuser of the brethren. He accuses them to God; and, as many of the articles are true, they would have reason to fear: but they have One in court, to nonsuit him: they have an Advocate with the Father. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." He accuses them before men. We see, from the early defences of Christianity, how much they were defamed. At their private suppers, they devoured their own infants. At their nocturnal meetings, they committed every crime that could disgrace human nature. If there was a fire or a famine, they caused the one and occasioned the other. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read, that Christians were a sect every where spoken against. It is so still; and some of the brightest characters that have adorned the Church and served their generation, in modern times, have been blackened by every vileness of imputation.

See the malignant cunning of this adversary, who goeth about seeking whom he may devour or distress. He can bring nothing against Job's conduct—this was undeniably fair and righteous; he therefore insinuates a charge against his motive. Are there none

that follow his example? "He is so and so. He does so and so—and this would be very well—but it is to please his connexions—to aid his business—to gain a name. Ah! were it real—but it is all outside, all shew, all pretence." Now nothing can be more *Satanic* than this. There is a great difference between judging ourselves, and judging others. In the one case, we cannot be too severe; in the other, we cannot be too candid—Yet the reverse of this practice commonly prevails. We should not judge ourselves only, or principally, by our actions; but by our motives, which enter so essentially into their morality. But we should judge others wholly by their conduct, and not by their motives—for these are cognizable only to God. It is his prerogative to search the heart. He will not condemn us for our ignorance of it. Charity thinketh no evil. It will always be far more honourable to be mistaken in any of our fellow-creatures, than to be suspicious of them.

Satan was right in the principle of his insinuation—That there was little to admire in Job's excellency, had he been a mere mercenary wretch, who, in all he did, had no regard for God, but to his own advantage only. Such actors there have always been. Thus Laban pressed Jacob to continue with him, not from affection or respect; but because, says he, I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake. In the same way the Shechemites reasoned: "Shall not their cattle, and their substance, and every beast of theirs, be ours? only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us." Jehu said, "See my zeal for the Lord:" but it was to aggrandize himself and his family; and he was even punished for actions which fulfilled the word of God.

Our Saviour did not commend those who followed him, because they did eat of the loaves and fishes. He early applied a test which would evince a regard for *himself* in those that adhered to him, saying, He that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple. And we always, in the conduct of our fellow-creatures, value a trifle that is done from pure regard, while we despise the splendid service that aims at the performer's own advantage.

But, though there was force in Satan's reasoning—yet, First, nothing could be more vile and false than his application of it to Job. And therefore God permitted him to be tried, that his rectitude might be found unto praise, and glory, and honour. Satan said, "Put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." Then says God, behold, all he *hath* is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. But he bears well the destruction of the whole.—Then, said Satan, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life." And he is now covered with sore boils, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. But in all this he sinneth not, nor charges God foolishly; and, instead of cursing him to his face, he exclaims—"Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

And, Secondly, we must distinguish between unprincipled selfishness, and excitements to gratitude and encouragement. The supreme reason, as well as the grand rule of obedience is the will of God. And the language of the Christian is, Lord, what wilt thou

have me to do? And the providence of God will often afford him opportunities to evince that the Divine glory is dearer to him than his secular advantage. But it cannot be wrong to think of the promises; and be animated in our difficulties by the view of what the Scripture has proposed to our hope. Thus Moses is not censured for having respect unto the recompence of the reward. And Jesus, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame.

And, Thirdly, though we ought not to serve God for gain as the motive, we cannot serve God for nought as to the result. He is a good master; and while his work is honourable and glorious, he deals well with his servants. In keeping his commandments there is great reward. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

DECEMBER 1.—EVENING.

"We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father."

JOHN i. 14.

HE had a glory; and he himself is called "the Lord of glory," and "the King of Glory." But it was not the glory of this world, or the princes of this world, which come to nought. It was not such a glory as the Jews expected in the Messiah, the glory of a conqueror, striding from victory to victory, and setting his followers on the high places of the earth. It was not a glory arising from ambition and violence, from the desolations of war, from triumphs founded in blood, and from laurels drenched in the tears of widows and orphans. It was not the glory of a

statesman working by policy, and ruling by cunning rather than rectitude, or even by fairer means—but a spotless, Godlike glory—"The glory as of the only begotten of the Father."

God has many children. Men are his offspring. All believers are the sons of God. Some in the household of faith have been exalted above their brethren in endowment and office. Solomon was great; but a greater than Solomon is here. Moses was faithful in all his house. Yet "this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after. But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." Adam is called "the son of God" in a very peculiar sense, as he came immediately from the hands of God, perfect at once, and was the source, head, and representative of the human race. But "so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven." Angels are sons of God: but, "to which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." "Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." "To which of the angels said he at any time,

Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" He is therefore—and we ask for no human definitions—we are afraid of them; the only begotten of the Father, in a meaning infinitely peculiar. He was the image of the invisible God; and could say, consistently with all the humility that distinguished him, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. And from henceforth ye know *him*, and have seen *him*." His attributes, his actions proclaimed Divinity. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God was seen in the face of Jesus Christ. His meekness, his patience, his benevolence, his readiness to forgive, are the perfections of the Being we adore and serve.

This glory had witnesses; and, says the Evangelist, we beheld it. They beheld it two ways: corporeally and spiritually. They beheld it even with their bodily senses. At his transfiguration they saw the lustre of his face, and the shining of his raiment, and the homage paid him by Moses and Elias; and heard the voice from the cloud, "saying, This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." They often heard his own voice speaking as never man spake, and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. They witnessed his miracles, and many more than they have recorded. They saw him heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind, and raise the dead to life. They saw his glory in the garden; in his feeling submission to the will of God; in his tender excuse for the infirmity of his disciples; in his power in healing the ear of Malchus; in his majesty in causing the soldiers to go backward and fall to the ground, when he only said, "I am he;" in his authority in stipulating for the safety of the Apostles, "If

ye seek me, let these go their way." They saw his glory also in the wonders that dignified his death and his resurrection.

But this was not all. Some witnessed his miracles, and ascribed them to the power of the devil. He said to many who had attended him, Ye also have seen me, and believed not. But it was otherwise with his own disciples. Concerning these he said; "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me." How much of his glory they saw spiritually before the day of Pentecost we cannot determine. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified; that is, it was not given so abundantly. For he had doubtless partially enlightened the disciples before. At an earlier period our Lord said to Peter upon his confession, "Flesh and blood have not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven;" and this applied also to his brethren. Yet their views were in many things comparatively obscure, till the Spirit of truth had led them into all truth, as to the dignity of his person, the design of his death, and the nature of his kingdom. Then he was revealed in them. Then they knew in whom they had believed, and could say with the most determined confidence, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

But can we make this acknowledgment? Have we seen his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father? This is *possible*. We cannot indeed

view him with our bodily eyes. But we may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. We can see him by faith. We have in our possession all that these original witnesses have told him. We have his picture. In the four Gospels we can look into his very heart. "He that seeth the Son and believeth on him hath everlasting life."

And this perception of him is *necessary*. And if you have seen his glory you have seen enough to fix and fill your minds, to produce self-abasement, to wean you from the world, to induce you to follow him whithersoever he goeth, to recommend him to others, and to pray, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory." And if this be the case, you will soon have another and a nobler sight of it. You will see him as he is. You will behold his face in righteousness—For the prayer will be accomplished; "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, to BEHOLD MY GLORY."

DECEMBER 2.—MORNING.

"And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

MATT. XV. 27.

To Him, said the dying Jacob, shall the gathering of the people be. To him, said the evangelical Isaiah, shall men come. He is the centre of all attraction, because he is the only source of relief. To whom, in all our ignorance, should we go, but to him who has the words of eternal life? To whom, in all our guilt

and weakness, but to him in whom we have righteousness and strength? To whom, in all our dangers and misery, but to him who is the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble? And, blessed be his Name, he is not only mighty to save, but has been pleased to assure us—"him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

But he may try the confidence he has bound himself not to disappoint. We have here an application made to him by a woman of Canaan, who cried to him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." Observe the discouragements she meets with. First, his silence—"He answered her not a word." Secondly, the address of his disciples. It is not certain that they pleaded for her relief at all: but if they did, it was in a spirit that we cannot admire. They betrayed impatience, and a wish to get rid of her importunity—"His disciples came, and besought him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us." Then here is, thirdly, a kind of exclusion, which seems to place her beyond the reach of his commission, if not of his pity—"He said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." All this not driving her away; He, fourthly, speaks as if he would add insult to rejection—"Is a dog to be treated like one of the family? It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs"—"And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Let us consider this, as the language of a sinner, applying for mercy, in the prayer of faith.

First. He allows the truth of God's word, however it may reflect upon him—"Truth, Lord." He

had, in effect, called the woman a dog; and nothing could have been more reproachful. We see this in the question of Hazael; and the offer of Abishai, with regard to Shimei—Among the Jews, too, a dog was an animal unclean, and forbidden in sacrifice: and God's utmost abhorrence of a victim was expressed by cutting off a dog's neck—Yet he says, "Truth, Lord"—I acquiesce in the censure. A sinner is called every thing that is vile in the Scripture—a-fool; a madman; a rebel; a traitor—unworthy of the least of all God's mercies—and deserving that his wrath should come upon him—And, Lord, says he, it is all true. And thou art justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest. Here, others stand out; but the convinced sinner is brought to add his amen, not only to the truth of God's word in general, but the truth of it with regard to his own personal guilt, depravity, and condemnation. And till we are brought to this, the Gospel can have nothing to do with us. It is a remedy: but a remedy is for the sick, and not for the healthful. The way to attain relief and comfort, is not to deny, conceal, or extenuate, our sins; but to confess them in all their heinousness; and, in dealing with God, to stand where his word places us.

Secondly. He draws encouragement from seeming repulse—"Yet, Lord." This is an exercise of spiritual understanding: but the absolute importance of the case makes the man alive to every opening of hope; and he is now under the influence of the Spirit, that is teaching him to be wise unto salvation. Thus, darkness is made light, and crooked things straight. Thus he rises above difficulties, which would otherwise be insuperable. He distinguishes between ap-

pearances and reality. "I know that, behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face." Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. If he wounds, it is to heal. I hope I am his, *because* I am thus. As long as he tries me, he is not saying, Let him alone. He would not thus prune the tree, if he had sentenced it to be cut down. I see what once I did not; and the discovery is painful; but if he was minded to kill me, he would not have shewed me such things as these. That be far from him, to trifle with my misery. In vain the enemy says, "But thy sins are so numerous and aggravated." They are: but this is the very reason why I should apply for mercy — Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.

Thirdly. He prizes the least communication from the Saviour—"Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table"—and this is all I crave. The very same sentiment is put into the mouth of the Prodigal—There is bread enough in my Father's house, and I perish with hunger—he never thought of the fatted calf; or the best robe, or of the ring on his hand, or the shoes on his feet—Oh! let me return to thy dear abode, and I shall not covet the chief room, or the highest seat—Make me as one of thine hired servants. Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ. David wished to be a door-keeper in the house of his God. The least grace is infinitely precious. It is connected with salvation; and makes us the heirs of promise. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Fourthly. He perceives the affluence and all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus. Though what I implore

is much for me to receive, it is nothing for thee to give. It is no more than a crumb from a king's table; and what is this to the viands on his board, and the resources of his wealth!—What I implore, thou wilt not miss; and I shall not rob thy children of their portion and plenty.

—Come, therefore, to him, remembering that he is Lord of all; that he is not only rich, but that his riches are unsearchable; that he has not only fulfilled the Law, but magnified it, and made it honourable; that his righteousness is the righteousness of God, by faith; that his blood cleanseth from all sin; that in him all fulness dwells.

—And he will give you not a dog's place, and a dog's portion; but he will put you among the children. He will seat you at his own table. He will say, Eat, O friends, and drink; yea, drink abundantly, O beloved. Was it not so here? Was he not charmed, instead of being displeased, with her earnest and continued application? Does he not commend her for not taking a denial; and for urging him apparently against his will?—"O woman! great is thy faith"—not, great is thy humility, thy importunity, thy perseverance: these *were* great; but *faith* was the root of them all. This, therefore, was what he admired in her. And this is the one thing needful for us. This alone will keep us steady to our purpose; this alone will carry us through all our difficulties. This insures our final success: this crowns us with praise, and glory, and honour, at the appearing of Jesus Christ. And he said unto her, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." So will he say to you. And you will be inexcusable indeed, if you do not avail your-

selves of the largeness of the offer; and ask, and receive, that your joy may be full.

DECEMBER 2.—EVENING.

"And it came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it, and all the instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had anointed them, and sanctified them; that the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes, and were over them that were numbered, offered: and they brought their offering before the Lord, six covered waggon and twelve oxen; a waggon, for two of the princes, and for each one an ox: and they brought them before the tabernacle. And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, Take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service. And Moses took the waggon and the oxen, and gave them unto the Levites. Two waggon and four oxen he gave unto the sons of Gershon, according to their service: and four waggon and eight oxen he gave unto the sons of Merari, according unto their service, under the hand of Ithamar, the son of Aaron the priest. But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was, that they should bear upon their shoulders." NUMB. vii. 1—9.

It was a sad censure and disgrace the Apostle was compelled to utter, when he said, "All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's." But it is delightful to see a public spirit in religion. And we have some noble instances of it recorded, not only in the New Testament, but the Old. In reading History these are the same, to a Christian, as the meeting with a few green and watered spots to a traveller in a dry and sandy desert.

With regard to the fact before us we may observe,

First, the donors. They were "the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes, and were over them that were numbered." This is well. They who are placed above others are peculiarly bound to take the lead in every thing moral and religious. They are under an obligation of gratitude to their Benefactor, who has distinguished and indulged them. They are also under an obligation of justice, which requires them to meet the design of their elevation, which is, not the indulgence of their vanity, pride, and selfishness, but their glorifying God, and serving their generation according to his will. They should consider their resources and influences as talents, and use them as stewards of the manifold grace of God. Having more means and opportunities of usefulness than others, they will be the more guilty if they neglect or misimprove them. When wicked, they never perish alone. Children justify themselves by the example of their parents, servants by that of their masters, people by that of their ministers, and subjects by that of their rulers; and one sinner thus circumstanced destroyeth much good. But all are not so. Some are preserved amidst the snares of wealth, rank, and authority; and feel it to be their honour and pleasure to do good. And we see from the offerers before us how wrong all general and indiscriminate reflections are. Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but there are some; and in our day there is no little movement among the higher classes in life.

Secondly, their offering. They "brought before the Lord six covered waggons, and twelve oxen: a waggon for two of the princes, and for each one an

ox." As twelve oxen were necessary, every prince could give one: but as six waggons only were required, had each waggon been given by an individual, six only could have been gratified; but by uniting in pairs all the twelve could equally share in the honour and pleasure.

Their use was to aid in the present service of the tabernacle. That service would not be needful when the ark had a fixed abode in Zion: but in its movable state assistance was required, in transporting it from place to place. These oxen therefore were to draw the vehicles containing the appendages pertaining to the sanctuary; and hence the waggons were covered, or, as we should say, tilted; not only to preserve the sacred furniture from vulgar and rude gaze, but to keep them from dust, and rain, and sunshine, and all the injuries of the weather.

Thirdly, the manner of their giving. There is no doubt but these oxen were excellent, strong to labour, and well trained; and that the waggons were of the best materials and workmanship, and well covered, in honour of their destination and use. We know some who, if they could not have escaped giving, would have looked out the leanest beast, and the least valued vehicle they had. And we know the complaint brought by God himself against the Jews in the days of Malachi: "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it: and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts,

and my name is dreadful among the heathen." But we may fully presume that these pious donors presented what they deemed the best they had. And we are sure they gave *readily*: for they did it the very "day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it and sanctified it." They gave as soon as the things were wanted; yea, before they were wanted, in order to be in readiness. Here was no hanging back, hoping the offering might be dispensed with; or to see what others did first, to save as much as possible their pocket, without losing their credit. They required no excitement, no sermon full of motives from Moses or Aaron to work upon their feelings—They were volunteers; self-moved; they chose to be examples rather than followers. God loveth a cheerful giver.

Fourthly, the acceptance and application of the present. At first Moses seems to have hesitated whether they should be used in the service of the tabernacle. The reason probably was, that God had given him before a model of every thing, and had said, "See that thou make every thing according to the pattern shewed thee in the Mount." But the pattern did not extend to this, and here he was without orders. The thought had sprung from the pious reflections of these men; and it is not necessary that every minute circumstance in the administration of religion should be prescribed: many things, or the world could not contain the books that would be written, may be, and must be, left to expediency. Thus David established the orders of singers; and thus the Jews, after their captivity, formed synagogues, in which our Saviour often taught and worshipped. Moses therefore is enjoined to receive this

donation, and consecrate it to the purpose for which it was designed: "Take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service. And Moses took the waggons and the oxen, and gave them unto the Levites."

But see how they were distributed. This will be found very instructive. To "the sons of Gershon he gave" but "two waggons and four oxen:" but this is said to be "according to their service;" for they had only to carry the drapery, the curtains, and hangings. To "the sons of Merari he gave four waggons and eight oxen, according to *their* service;" for they had to bear the heavy luggage, the boards, pillars, and sockets; and these were weighty. "But to the sons of Kohath he gave none; because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was, that they should bear upon their shoulders." We may hence observe, First—That there is a difference in the services to which we are called. Some of them are more public, and some more private; some more painful, and some more pleasing. One serves God more relatively; another more personally—His work, so to speak, is mere shoulder work. They have no outward resources: no waggons or oxen—They cannot command others by their authority or their abilities, but they can give *themselves*. If they are without substance, they can act: they can collect; they can teach in a Sunday school; they can visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction. "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or mi-

nistry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." "For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? if the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?"

Secondly, there is a proportion between our work and our strength; and "according to" our "service" is the assistance provided. Every Christian may claim Asher's promise: "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days so shall thy strength be." "He will not suffer you," says the Apostle, "to be tempted above that ye are able." And has not this been exemplified in the experience of his people in all ages? And have not we found it true? Let the thought at once annihilate every tendency to envy—or despair. Say not, Ah! such an one has four waggons and eight oxen! But see what he has to carry! You may not know the extent and degree of his burden, but the Lord knows; and therefore as the sufferings abound the consolations abound also. Be not afraid of any work or trial that lies before you. View the things which would discourage you, not simply, as they are in themselves, but relatively to your resources. There is nothing to which he will call you for which he has not made provision; and his grace will be sufficient for you, for his strength is made perfect in weakness. What is it for your diffi-

culties or duty to be increased, if there be an increase of the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ?

DECEMBER 8.—MORNING.

"Behold, I am vile." Job xl. 4.

VILE, says Johnson's Dictionary, signifies mean, worthless, base, despicable, impure. There is nothing in the world to which this applies so well as to sin. And it is to sin the exclaimer here refers. He does not call himself vile because he was reduced and poor. By this no man of reflection would ever feel himself degraded. A horse is not valued for his trappings; but for his strength, or his speed. Character is a personal thing, and independent of outward circumstances. If poverty, as some fools seem to judge, make a man vile, how vile were the Apostles, who could say, "We hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place!" And how vile was He who had not where to lay his head!

Nor does he call himself vile because he was diseased, and full of sore boils from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. The Scripture, indeed, calls the body "this vile body;" and it is truly humbling, not only in the putrefaction of the grave, but frequently also even in life. How low are some of its appetites! how mortifying some of its infirmities! while some of its diseases are so trying as to require all the force of friendship to discharge the common duties of humanity. But there are no "wounds, bruises, putrefying sores," to be compared with the

effects of sin—nothing is so vile as this—This makes us abominable to God himself; and is the only thing that does render us offensive. And how loathsome must that be, that causes the Creator to abhor the work of his own hands; and the Father of mercies to punish it with everlasting destruction from his presence; and to refuse to pardon it without the sacrifice of his own Son!

But who makes this confession? Is it a profligate wretch, whose iniquity in its effects has been found to be hateful, even to himself? Is it a penitent newly awakened, and looking into his own heart, that had been concealed from him before? No: but Job, a saint, and a saint of no ordinary magnitude. You have heard of the patience of Job; and know how he is mentioned by Ezekiel, along with Noah and Daniel, as one of three who were pre-eminently righteous; and how God, the Judge of all, calls him “a perfect and an upright man.” Yet this is he who cries, “Behold, I am vile”! And what do we learn from hence but this—That the most gracious characters are the most remote from vain-glory; and that they are always more affected with their imperfections than with their excellences? The nearer we approach completeness in anything, the more easily we shall discern, and the more sensibly we shall feel, our remaining deficiencies. A little learning puffeth up; but modesty and diffidence attend profound science. The advancing in knowledge is like sailing down a river, which widens as we proceed, till we find ourselves launched on the sea, and lose sight of the shore. Whoever vaunts himself as sinless, Paul did not. “I have not attained,” says he, “I am not already perfect:” “I am less than the least of all

saints : " I am the chief of sinners." Not that there is no difference between a saint and a sinner. Job does not mean, that he loved sin, or lived in sin. His friends accused him of this ; but he denied it : and, turning to God, could say, " Thou knowest that I am not wicked." But he knew that in many things he offended ; and in every thing came short of the glory of God. He was aware of the remains of sin opposing, hindering, vexing, polluting, his renewed mind ; and, though they appeared not to the view of others in gross transgressions, they were constantly felt by himself in an evil heart of unbelief, prone to depart from the living God ; and constraining him to sigh, " O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death !"

And let us observe also when this acknowledgment was made. It was immediately after God's interposition, and appearance, and address : " Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge ? Gird up now thy loins like a man ; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me." Then he displayed before him some of his works and perfections. " Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said, Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him ? He that reproveth God, let him answer it. *Then* Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile"—Teaching us, that the more we have to do with God, the more we shall see and feel our nothingness and unworthiness. What can make us so sensible of our ignorance as *his* wisdom ; of our weakness as *his* power ; of our pollution as *his* purity—the purity of Him in whose sight the very heavens are not clean ! Those are struck with little things who have never

be. ~~we~~ ^{we} ~~had~~ ^{had} to see greater ones. But travelling enlarges the mind, and fills it with new and superior images; so that, on our return, we think nothing of the river, and the hill, and the plain, of our native village. The queen of Sheba prided herself upon her magnificence till she came to Jerusalem, and had seen Solomon in all *his* glory. He that has been introduced to the Lord of all, and has had communion with him, will never think highly of himself again. "The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." Ah! said Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

"The more thy glories strike mine eyes,
The humbler I shall lie."

—And I need not be afraid of the effect—my pride is the only prevention of my happiness—

"Thus while I sink, my joys shall rise
Unmeasurably high."

DECEMBER 3.—EVENING.

"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."
HEB. v. 8.

THE title here given to the Lord Jesus is applied to him *peculiarly*, and in a way of *dignity*. This is obvious from the very reasoning of the Apostle: for there is nothing wonderful in the supposition that a son should learn obedience by suffering—for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But the

marvellousness is, that *such* a son should learn obedience by the things which *he* suffered.

Here let us keep close to the Scripture, and not pry into things which we have not seen. All mankind are the offspring of God, as he is the real author of their being, the framer of their bodies, and the former of their spirits within them. Adam is called "the son of God," as he was immediately produced by his power, and made after his image, not only in dominion, but knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, in distinction from all the inferior orders of his creatures. This likeness was soon lost by the Fall; and hence the term soon became in the Scriptures a religious appellation, serving to discriminate the godly from the wicked. When all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth, the descendants of Seth are called "the sons of God," because they worshipped, served, and resembled him. Christians therefore obtain this honour in the New Testament: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." They are so by adoption and regeneration. The angels, those pure intelligences, unincumbered with our flesh and blood, are also thus characterized: "The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." But "unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son? And again when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and

ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." We leave the conclusion to yourselves—It *must* lead you to consider him "above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."

And what does the Apostle affirm concerning him? He suffered; he obeyed; he learned. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

He *suffered*. He was "a man of sorrows," as if he derived his very character from them, "and acquainted with grief." Grief is always our neighbour, and sometimes our visiter; but it was his companion, and never separated from him till he gave up the ghost. Who can describe or imagine the greatness and the number of "the things he suffered"—in his outward estate? in his reputation? in his connexions? in his body? in his soul? Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto his sorrow!

He *obeyed*. His obedience was very superior to ours. It was complete and universal. He did no sin. He omitted no duty. He always did the things that pleased the Father; and therefore at the close of the whole he could confidently make the appeal, "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do." His obedience also appeared in his submission. We are required to obey God as our governor, as well as our lawgiver; and to acquiesce in his appointments, as well as fulfil his orders. And here, alas! how often do we fail! It is no easy thing to bear sickness, to resign a pleasant situation, to part with a beloved child—to obey a correcting God! How often we rebel or repine! But

without a murmuring word or feeling, he submitted to all the pleasure of his heavenly Father, saying, Not my will, but thine be done. Even his death, and all that led to it, was an act of obedience—He “was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” He said, “Lo! I come to do thy will, O God;” and that will required the sacrifice of himself as an offering for sins. Hence, as he was going forth to agonize in the garden, and suffer on the cross, he said, “But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do; arise, let us go hence.”

He *learned*—“He learned obedience by the things which he suffered.” Many do not. Experience, says Franklin, is a dear school; but fools will learn in no other. The truth is, *they* will not learn even in this. Only wise men, says Burke, ever derive wisdom from experience. Experience itself is thrown away upon others, like seed sown upon a rock, or the sand of the sea. Under what an expensive course of tuition have some passed! Yet what have they learned? May we not say of them, in the language of Jeremiah, “O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return”? When this is the case, the incorrigibleness is punished in one of these two ways: God either abandons the culprit, saying, He is joined to idols, let him alone; or, if he does not remove the rod, he turns it into a scorpion. He increases the severity and the grievousness of the strokes till the threatening is awfully accomplished; “He that, being often

reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." At the most distant danger of which, the Israelite indeed falls upon his knees and cries, "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." And says David, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest and teachest out of thy law." This is the design of affliction, and the effect of it when sanctified. Some of our lessons have cost us much, but they have not cost us too much if we have learned obedience by the things we have suffered.

But this does not apply to the Son of God precisely in the same way it does to us. The distinction is this. He learned obedience by the things he suffered; but he did not learn *to* obey. David's afflictions humbled his pride, banished his sloth, roused his attention, and excited him to study the will of God; and therefore he said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes"—Thus he learned by his sufferings *to* obey. But Jesus stood in need of no such stimulations and auxiliaries as these. He knew what was required of him, and was always perfectly ready to do it. *His* sufferings therefore were not the cause of his obedience, but only the occasion: they did not produce the disposition, but only afforded opportunities for the exercise and the display of it. The gold was sterling before, but the fire proved it: the field did not make the hero, but proclaimed him. Yet he could not have learned what obedience was, how trying it is, especially in affliction, and what grace it requires, without experience. But *thus* he knew it not

in theory only, but in reality; as a man learns the taste of medicine by tasting it, or as a man knows what it is to travel by travelling.

DECEMBER 4.—MORNING.

"Make me to know my transgression and my sin."

JOS xiii 23.

THE desire of knowledge seems natural to every man. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. But who wishes to know *himself*? Yet this is the knowledge we want. And there are two things concerning ourselves, which it argues a gracious state of mind to be willing to know—Our mortality, and our depravity. A natural man turns away from both these. But, says David, "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." And, says Job, "Make me to know my transgression and my sin."

To explore the offences of others is a common wish. The information not only gratifies curiosity, but feeds malevolence; and furnishes the salt which seasons the conversation of the multitude. But, says Job, "Make me to know *my* transgression and *my* sin."

And what does he wish to know concerning them? Their number. Their guilt. Their pollution. Their aggravation.

And this knowledge he seeks from God. He alone can teach us to profit. Conviction is the work of his own Spirit. But he uses means; and shews us our transgression and our sin—by the Law—and by the Gospel—and by friends and enemies—and by the

dispensations of his providence. But he does it gradually. We could not bear all the disclosure at once—It would drive us into distraction or despair. He therefore tells us to turn again into the chamber of imagery, and we shall see greater abominations. And this will serve to explain a case in the Christian's experience. He sometimes supposes himself to grow worse, because he grows wiser. He seems more sinful, because he is more enlightened : there is not more evil in him ; but he sees more.

The effect of this knowledge, in the first instance, will be wonder. It calls us out of darkness into God's marvellous light. We are astonished that he has borne with us so long ; we are astonished that we have acted such a foolish, such an ungrateful part, we are astonished that we did not see these things before, for they now strike us with all the force of evidence ; and we are astonished that we see them now—since the thousands around us are blind still, and we were once blind also. But the result of the discovery will be as important and useful as it is surprising.

Self-knowledge will produce self-annihilation. Self-vindication will be at an end ; and we shall condemn ourselves. Self-complacency will be at an end ; and we shall loathe ourselves. Self-dependence will be at an end ; and we shall have no confidence in the flesh. "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."

Hence will arise the endearment of the Saviour. How precious is the refuge now the danger is seen ! How inviting the healing fountain appears now we feel our disease ! For want of this sensibility, many

read and hear of the Lord Jesus with indifference. How can it be otherwise? They that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick. The full soul loathes the honeycomb; but to the hungry every bitter thing is sweet.

Hence also submission under afflictive dispensations. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, said the Church, because I have sinned against him. Why, says Jeremiah, should a living man complain? Aaron's recollection of his making a calf just before kept him dumb in the loss of his sons. And David felt, from his adultery and murder, how well it became him to say, in Absalom's rebellion, Here I am; let the Lord do what seemeth him good. If a Christian has nothing criminal in particular to fix upon, he will see enough in his general temper and walk to keep him from thinking that God deals hardly with him. The wonder with him will be—not that his trials are so many, but so few; not that so many of his comforts are taken, but that any are left.

Another advantage will be habitual gratitude. The proud are never thankful. Heap whatever favours upon them, and what reward have ye? They think they deserve it. You are only doing your duty—You are doing justly, rather than loving mercy. But when we are humble, in the same proportion we shall be grateful. When we feel that we are not worthy of the least of all God's mercies, how thankful shall we be for the bread we eat, and the water we drink!—What, then, shall we feel for the word of his truth! and the Son of his love!

Finally. As we are sensible of our depravity we shall be tender towards others. Faithful dealing with ourselves will always be accompanied with candid

dealing with our fellow-creatures. When we are much at home we cannot live much abroad. When we are employed in pulling the beams out of our own eyes, we shall not have much time for finding motes in those of others. If there be a difference between us and them, we shall ascribe it, when we know ourselves, to the mercy and grace of God—He has made us to differ—and we have nothing but what we have received. If we meet with things which are really wrong, and which we cannot deny, we shall not rejoice, but weep. And if a brother be overtaken in a fault, we shall restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted.

Mandeville, in his Fable of the Bees, and Rochefoucault, in his Maxims, and many infidel writers, have shewn great acquaintance with the depravity of human nature. But they learned it from the Devil—and the scholars felt like the teacher. They delighted in the subject. They loved to expose it. It was their interest to degrade and vilify human nature, to draw from it arguments for hatred, injury, selfishness, and distrust. But God teaches us the depravity of human nature principally through our own depravity. And with his teaching, he communicates his own Spirit. We therefore pity our common nature. We mourn over its dishonour. We pray for our fellow-sinners. We long to save them.

DECEMBER 4.—EVENING.

"When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

JOB xxiii. 10.

JOB *was* indeed tried, and perhaps next to his Saviour could say, Behold, and see if there was

sorrow like unto my sorrow! But he remarks three things with regard to it.


First, the author: "*He* hath tried me." In none of his sufferings did he ever lose sight of the hand of God. When the Chaldeans and the elements had spoiled him of all his substance, he said, "The *Lord* hath taken away." And when, in addition to this, he was deprived of his children, and health, and friends, and he seemed to have no comfort left, he said, "*Thou* hast taken me by the neck, and shaken me to pieces." And "is there an evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" How much is that man to be pitied who does not connect with all the events of life the providence of that God without whom a sparrow falleth not to the ground, and by whom the very hairs of our head are all numbered! How consolatory to reflect, "I am not in a fatherless world; I am not the child of neglect; I am not the sport of chance; I am not at the mercy of my foes—they could have no power against me, except it was given them from above; they are chained; and he holds the chain—The wrath of man shall praise him; and the remainder of wrath will he restrain—The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it?"

Secondly, the termination: "*when* he hath tried me, *I shall come forth*." I am now in "the midst of trouble;" but I shall not remain there. He doth not afflict willingly. Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion. He hath said, "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." The time may seem long, but I shall not be detained a moment longer than the case requires. He hath appointed the hour of deliverance,

and his time is the best time; for he is a God of knowledge, and blessed are all they that wait for him. "We went," says the Church, "*through* fire and *through* water, but thou *broughtest* us out into a wealthy place."

Thirdly, the benefit: "when thou hast tried me I shall come forth *as gold*." And how is this? Gold comes forth *proved*. Thus we read of "gold tried in the fire;" and David says, "Thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried." The design of affliction is not to increase God's knowledge of us—this is perfect already; but to make us better known to others and to ourselves; to discover and display the reality and the degree of our grace; to *prove* whether we are humble enough to stoop, and patient enough to wait: whether we can love God when he corrects and trust in him when he hideth himself.

Gold comes forth *purified*. A stranger to the process of refining, when he saw it melting in the intenseness of the fire, might suppose that it was likely to be destroyed, or at least that it must be injured. And it is reduced in size, and something is taken away from it—but it is only the dross, and this is better removed than retained. And who hath said, "I will also purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin"? "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin; when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalkstones that are beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up." What did the three Hebrews lose in the flames? Only their bonds. When they were thrown in, they were bound; "and they fell down *bound* into the midst of



the burning fiery furnace." In this state they could not have moved. But, without the smell of fire passing upon their bodies, their bonds were burnt, and they were seen walking with the Son of God! Much like this Young sings—

" Our hearts are fasten'd to the world,
With strong and various ties ;
But every trouble cuts a string,
And urges us to rise."

Gold comes forth *prepared*. It is then fitted to be coined for circulation, or framed into vessels of ornament and use; and now rendered capable of a lustre which it had not before. So Christians are improved and advanced by their trials, and can say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." "For a season, if needs be," says Peter, "ye are in heaviness." "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Job speaks with confidence of the blessed result before he had realized it. So may every believer. For "*all* the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth." And "*we know* that all things work together for good to them that love God."

DECEMBER 5.—MORNING.

"This *man* shall be the peace, when the Assyrians shall come into our land."

MICAH v. 5.

THAT the Messiah is the person here intended, will not be denied by those who read the verses im-

mediately preceding ; and which speak so expressly of his incarnation and glory. The word *man*, indeed, as the italics apprise us, is not in the original. The sentence therefore reads, "And this shall be the peace—This person, of whom the prophet had been just speaking ; he who was born as the ruler in Bethlehem, and whose goings forth were from everlasting—He shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God ; and they shall abide : for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth." The translators, therefore, should rather have put in the word Ruler or Shepherd. But, whatever be the supplement, it all comes to the same, provided *he himself* be understood ; who is all our salvation, and all our desire—For "this shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land."

But who is this Assyrian ? The word cannot be taken literally. The Assyrians never entered Judæa after the birth of Christ. It is therefore used, metaphorically, for some enemy ; nothing being more common than for the sacred writers to express, by the name of Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon, any significant adversary ; as those powers had distinguished themselves by their hatred, oppression, and enslaving of the Jews. The intimation, therefore, is better than if it had been more definite ; as we may now include every thing that annoys and alarms ; every thing that would injure or destroy. Be the case what it may, he is our principal, our only relief. He does not exempt us from trouble and conflict ; but he affords us assistance, comfort, and deliverance. Storms may arise ; but he is our stronghold. Enemies may assail us : but he will give us victory at

last, and even now keep our minds in perfect peace, being stayed on him.

Let us think of several of these Assyrians; and see how, when they invade us, and would swallow us up, he is our peace. Does the broken law of God threaten us? I say the broken law of God—A man has nothing to fear from it when it is perfectly kept; for the man that doeth these things shall live in them. But the soul that sinneth it shall die. The curse enters through every breach of transgression. And who is not, therefore, exposed? Who can be so ignorant as to imagine that he has continued in all things written in the book of the law to do them? Now here is a condition to be in! The commandment coming—sin reviving—hope dying—and nothing expected but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment! But he is our peace, who died for our offences, and rose again for our justification—

“Go, ye that rest upon the Law,
And toil, and seek salvation there :
Look to the flames that Moses saw ;
And fear, and tremble, and despair.


“But I’ll retire beneath the Cross—
Saviour, at thy dear feet I lie;
And the keen sword that justice draws,
Flaming and red, shall pass me by.”

Or does our adversary the Devil terrify? Oh! you say, when I think of his wiles, and strength, and his successes for near six thousand years; and when I consider myself—here is enough to fill me, not only with dread, but despair. What am I to the powers of darkness? No more than a “worm to a mountain!” Well, be it so: the promise is, “Fear not, thou

worm Jacob; for thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small as the dust." In the Lord you have not only righteousness, but strength. Think of him, and take courage. In all these things you are more than conquerors, through him that loved you.

Or do we complain of the sin that dwelleth in us? A Christian must feel this, and ought to feel it, and be deeply humbled before God on the account of it. Paul felt it; and felt it more than he felt all his sufferings—"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But where does he find relief? "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord"—"He will save me from my sins; and not only from their dominion—but their very being. He has begun a good work in me, and he will finish it. My sanctification *will* be as complete as my justification now is. He is not only able to keep me from falling, but to present me faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

Or do we consider the troubles of life? In accordance with this very case, he said to his disciples, In the world ye shall have tribulation; but in me ye shall have peace. And they found it so, and could acknowledge, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." Modern Christians may not be called to suffer persecutions as they did; but they may be the subjects of personal and relative trials, which require the same support and solace; and they equally belong to him; and are never dearer to his heart than in the hour of affliction;—and he will not leave them comfortless. Is it nothing to know that he has removed every thing penal from thy sufferings?—that he will never leave thee nor forsake thee?—that his grace shall be



sufficient for thee?—and that all thy sorrows shall yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness?

—But death! Death is called the king of terrors. Who can wonder that we should feel at the approach of it? And where would be the triumph of faith if we did not? But it is possible to rise above this enemy. We know it from Scripture. We know it from observation. And whence comes the victory? Persons may die insensibly; or they may banish the subject from their minds: but, if a man thinks of it, and thinks of it properly, there is only one relief when this Assyrian approaches us. It is to see him that has “abolished death.” It is to hear him saying, “He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” And this is not all. The enemy is not only disarmed by him, but turned into a friend. The curse is converted into a blessing. To die is gain; and gain too generally in the experience, as well as always in the result.—Well, therefore, could David say, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

Behold the Consolation of Israel. Whatever would dismay us, let us look towards him, and say—“This same shall comfort us.” Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!

DECEMBER 5.—EVENING.

' And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire : so Jeremiah sunk in the mire." JER. xxxviii. 6.

HERE he was not as "an evil-doer," but "for righteousness' sake," and a faithful discharge of his duty. "And this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." The condition was dreadful, owing to the depth, and dreariness, and unwholesomeness, and foulness of the place. The heart revolts at the thought of the sufferer, sinking lower and lower in the mire by every effort to raise himself up, parched with thirst, fainting with hunger, gasping for free air, and a stone being laid upon the mouth of the pit, excluding not only ventilation, but light! And the design of the princes was, that he should not only suffer there, but die of privation and disease; longing to rid themselves of their reprover, but fearing that a public execution would excite popular pity—Thus Herod sent and beheaded John in prison—And how many fearful secrets of this kind will be divulged when He maketh inquisition for blood!

Who could think that a number of persons in higher and more refined life, and commonly called "the better sort of people," would be able to leave a fellow-creature, a prophet of the Lord, to perish by so lingering and frightful a death! Lord, what is man! But all things come alike to all. No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before

them. These wicked princes are in their palaces, and Jeremiah is in the miry dungeon. But where is the God of judgment? We shall presently see—“Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”

We are not told *here* what Jeremiah did ; but he himself has informed us in one of his lamentations “They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me. I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice : hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee : thou saidst, Fear not.” And what was the consequence? The wrath of man praises God: the evil is overruled for good; and the prophet learns by experience that the Master he served commanded the issues from death, and was a very present help in trouble.

What a scene here opens! “Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king’s house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin; Ebed-melech went forth out of the king’s house, and spake to the king, saying, My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city. Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die.” Here we find how the

Lord can raise up helpers for his people from quarters the most unlikely. He "knoweth how to deliver the godly;" and often renders his interposition as marvellous as it is relieving. Here we also see that the Lord has his hidden ones, and that they are frequently found where we should little think of looking after them—"Surely the fear of God," said Abraham, "is not in this place;" but it was there, and prevented the sin which would otherwise have been committed. Abijah had some good thing in him towards the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam. Daniel was the prime minister of Darius, and yet worshipped God three times a day. Yea, we read of saints even in Cæsar's household. Zedekiah's court was a very wicked one; yet here was a man of principle, and of religious principle, found in it. But who was he? A foreigner, an "Ethiopian," a negro. Call nothing common or unclean. The first may be last, and the last may be first. While all the princes and the men of Judah were destitute of humanity and piety, this Ethiopian abounded in both.

He had a place at court which secured him ease and comfort. Such persons commonly feel little disposition to exert themselves for the distresses of others, for they know not the heart of a sufferer. It is in the school of affliction we learn to weep with them that weep. But it is probable that Ebed-melech had been in trouble himself. However this may be, his interference was unsolicited and prompt, as soon as ever he "heard that they had put Jeremiah into the dungeon." And he shewed herein no little courage as well as kindness. He had much to lose, and the princes were likely to unite against him, for they were all the determined enemies of Jeremiah,

and their malice made them ready for any mischief, and their influence was great; and the king to whom he appealed was then sitting in the gate, and therefore he had to go to him openly. But conviction nerves a man to his purpose; and there is no fear in love.

And his application was successful. The king complied with his desire. Let this encourage us in our pious and in our benevolent endeavours. We may succeed much better than we imagine. The individual that refuses at one time may yield at another. Reflection may have changed him: some event or influence may have put him into a propitious frame. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." "Be not weary in well-doing, for in due time ye shall reap if ye faint not." All of us have some influence with others, and how seldom do we exert it as we ought—especially when we consider that the hearts of all are in the hand of the Lord, and he can turn them whithersoever he pleaseth!

DECEMBER 6.—MORNING.

"So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine arm-holes, under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon; and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison."

JER. xxxviii. 11—13.

DAVID had said, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." And two instances are re-

recorded in the Scripture to encourage us, as a kind of first-fruits. The one is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles: "A man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning; and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet." Philip joined him, instructed him, and baptized him; "and he went on his way rejoicing." The other was found, ages before, in the corrupt court of Zedekiah. We have seen, in the preceding exercise, how this pious and humane Ethiopian had nobly distinguished himself, by applying to the king on the behalf of Jeremiah. Having obtained the royal permission to release him from the dismal dungeon, and being furnished with thirty men for the purpose, we here see how he accomplished the work.

If such circumstances are deemed unworthy of attention, let the Spirit of God be condemned for recording them, and not the preacher for noticing them. We are here led forcibly to remark, that nothing should be wasted, not only in common, but in higher life. Here we find, even in "the house of the king, and under the treasury," that is, in the store-room, old and injured apparel, laid by for use. And let it not be forgotten, that when our Saviour had shewn his power by multiplying five loaves and two fishes into more than a sufficiency to supply the whole multitude, he then, even then, enforced a lesson of economy and frugality: even then he said, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost," to shew that ability and plenty do not justify, or even excuse any degree of wastefulness. It is by guarding, not only against needless buying, but heedless spending, that

the capacity for beneficence is to be enlarged. Our resources are diminished, not only by pride and indulgence, but by want of regulation and negligence. How is it that some, with a very limited income, not only provide things honest in the sight of all men, but have to give to him that needeth?

There is little charity in giving away what we cannot use ourselves; but it is the most shameful uncharitableness *not* to do it. Yet to mention only one instance—How often, in gardens, have we seen vegetables perishing, for which many a family of hungry children would have been thankful! For we should reflect on the degrees of exigency, and remember that what is of no value to us may be of most pressing importance to others, even to the leavings of the plainest table, and the remnants of the poorest wardrobe.

Jeremiah seems to have been a large, heavy man; and the ropes might have pained and bruised him; and the dungeon was deep. Ebed-melech therefore provides a softening, and lets it down, and desires him to put it under his arm-holes. We should see from this example, not only to do good, but to relieve with tenderness. As much often depends upon the manner of conferring a benefit as upon the thing itself: we are therefore by love to serve one another, and to be not only charitable, but pitiful and courteous. We have seen some refusing with more kindness than others have given; the plaintive countenance, the melting eye, the soothing voice, shewing at the time that it was not the will, but the power that was wanting. How much a female adds to the impression of her relief by the deli-

eacy with which she dispenses it! The manner as well as the principle of charity may render it *a grace*.

But our love is to abound in knowledge and in all judgment. We therefore, Finally, see the prudence as well as the kindness of this good man. Though he had drawn him up, he did not urge him to escape, but let him "remain in the court of the prison." He did this for two reasons. First, *there* he would be more under the king's protection than if he was immediately set at large. And, Secondly, *there* he would be more likely to be better provided for in the straitness of the dearth, as we see from the end of the foregoing chapter, when the king ordered him to abide there before his wretched confinement: "Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison."

DECEMBER 6.—EVENING.

"Now the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring my words, upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord."

JER. xxxix. 15—18.

It is observable that Jeremiah himself was charged with this consolatory message to Ebed-melech, who had acted so nobly as his friend, and obtained his de-

liverance from the dungeon. Nothing could have been more agreeable and delightful to his feelings than to be the medium of such a communication : for grace, by making a man humble, always makes him grateful ; and though his praise is principally due to the Author of all his mercies, he will not overlook the instruments.

The address implies the apprehension of Ebed-melech ; yea, it is expressly said, he was "afraid." Of whom ? Of the princes whose doings he had opposed and censured ? or the Chaldeans that were now encompassing the city ? It is not possible to determine this ; neither is it necessary. But while he is informed that the words concerning Jerusalem should be accomplished, and that he should witness it, he receives the assurance : "But I will deliver *thee* in that day, saith the Lord : and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword ; but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee.'

Behold the value and importance of life, and see how able the Lord is to secure it even in the midst of general calamity and desolation ; according to the promise : "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust ; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night ; nor for the arrow that flieth by day ; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness ; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand ; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked." The preservation of Noah in the Deluge, of Lot in the overthrow of Sodom and

Gomorrath, of the Israelites in Goshen, from the plagues of Egypt, and of the mourners in Ezekiel from the men with the slaughter-weapons; all these shew that "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

If Ebed-melech believed this declaration, he would not only dwell safely, but be in quiet from the fear of evil, his mind kept in perfect peace, being stayed upon God. When we consider the structure of our frame, and the numberless dangers to which we are exposed, we cannot reckon upon living a day or an hour to an end, without the Preserver of men. But all our times are in his hand; and he makes us immortal till our work is done—

"Hast thou not given thy word
To save my soul from death?
And I can trust my Lord
To keep my mortal breath.
I'll go and come,
Nor fear to die,
Till from on high
Thou call me home."

But see the reason assigned for his gracious regard: "Because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord." It was really for his kindness to Jeremiah: but God notices, not the practice, but the principle which had produced it; and without which he would not have been actuated to do as he had done. Men judge of motives by actions; God judges of actions by motives; and the motive is more with him than every thing else. So indeed it is with us as far as we ascertain it, in any instance of conduct towards ourselves. Hence we value a trifle if it springs from

real regard, more than a much larger present if it arises from selfishness. We may indeed be mistaken in our constructions: but God is not mocked, his judgment is always according to truth. The case before us is not a solitary one. We should have commended the humanity and humility of the centurion; and the prayer and perseverance of the Syro-phenician woman: but our Lord only spake of their faith.

Some people always seem afraid of faith, as if it were hardly compatible with holiness and morality; whereas, it is the medium, the origin of them; it is the spring of these streams, it is the root of these branches. It is in every respect operative; but it peculiarly works by love. He is the most likely to shew mercy who has received mercy; to forgive who has been forgiven.

But the whole shews us that Ebed-melech had no reason to repent of his work of *faith* and labour of love towards the Lord's servant. Jeremiah could not repay him; but this was so much the better for his benefactor. This is the very reason which our Saviour adduces to excite attention to the poor: "For they cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." It is finely said, "He that giveth to the poor *lendeth* unto the Lord." A man does not think of returning what is given him; but if he has any sense of honour and of justice, he will not retain what is lent. And would the Lord borrow and not repay? He has bound himself not only to accept, but to reward the services of his people, and the reward is not the less great, or the less certain, because it is a reward of grace and not of debt. "He that receiveth a prophet in the

name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

DECEMBER 7.—MORNING.

"Hast thou not made an hedge about him?" Job i. 10.

THIS was the question of Satan. The design of it was crafty and cruel: it was to insinuate, that Job's religion was all mercenary. Therefore, no sooner had God extolled him, (who can stand before envy?) than "Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast not thou made an hedge about him?" But though the motive he ascribes to Job is false, it is otherwise with the condition he represents him to be in. It was true that God had made a hedge about him; and he does the same for all believers. Three things may be inferred from it.

First. God's people must be dear and valuable, otherwise he would not make a hedge about them. Men do not incur expense, and take pains to fence in a wilderness, a common, or a dunghill; but only what they set a price upon. "Since," says God, "thou hast been precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." This love "passeth knowledge." His vineyard, his gar-

den, his jewels, his children, his bride, are not so dear and precious to their owner as all the subjects of divine grace are to God—"The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him; in them that hope in his mercy."

Secondly. They must be liable to danger and injury—Why else should he make a hedge about them? They are exposed to the same perils with others. But they have many which are peculiar to themselves, because of their new state, and character, and privileges. David admits this; "Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of my enemies." They were all around him, looking on, ready to seize his comfort, and destroy his person. What is the language of every awakened soul? "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! Many there be that rise up against me." And as they are numerous, so they are malicious, wise, and powerful; and would soon overcome him; but his help cometh from the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Thirdly. They must be safe whatever evils encompass them. For they do not lie opened and unguarded—God has made a hedge about them. What he does for the safety of his people must be effectual. Therefore the Church says, "Save me, and I *shall* be saved; for thou art my praise." His power is almighty; and he saveth by his right hand them that put their trust in him from them that rise up against them. He keeps them as the apple of the eye. He that keepeth Israel never slumbers nor sleeps. Lest any hurt them, says he, I will keep them night and day. But how far does this hedge extend? It reaches to his estate—his business—his

dwelling-place—his family—his reputation—his body—his soul—"Hast not thou made an hedge about *him*? and about his *house*? and about *all* that he hath on *every* side?"

But here it may be asked, How does this subject harmonize with observation and experience? Do not his people sometimes suffer losses and injuries as well as others? We must distinguish between their spiritual and their temporal condition. With regard to the former, their security is absolute: they are kept by the power of God through faith, unto salvation. But as to the latter, their preservation is conditional. It is never absolutely promised; and the reason is, because it is not essential to their welfare. Yea, sometimes the removal of a temporal good is a greater blessing than the continuance of it; and is even indispensable to some higher advantage. But, with regard to every injury or loss in their temporal interests, there are two things which should always be remembered; and they ought to be sufficient to set their hearts at rest. The one is, that the loss or injury is entirely under the Divine permission. Nothing can touch a hair of their head without leave from their heavenly Father. Satan could do nothing against Peter till he had "desired to have him, that he might sift him as wheat." And so here. Satan walked around this hedge; and peeped through; and stood tiptoe to look over, with envy and malice—but could not reach to touch his body, no, nor even one of his servants or sheep, till God, for the trial of Job, allowed him. The other is—that the permission is always invariably regulated by the wisdom and goodness of their God, who loves them infinitely better than they love themselves.

He that spared not his own Son, will withhold no good thing from them. He does not afflict willingly : but every trial he employs has a purpose to serve that will evince, in due time, even the kindness of the dispensation, and enable the sufferers to acknowledge with praise, It is good for me that I have been afflicted.

Let his people, therefore, hearken unto him, and dwell safely ; and be in quiet from the fear of evil.

DECEMBER 7.—EVENING.

“And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him.”

LUKE ix. 42.

—FEARFUL of losing his prey—hating to have him cured—and wishing to prevent the display of the Saviour’s goodness and power. He could not, indeed, really hinder the deliverance ; but he did what he could.

There is no coming to our Saviour now, as persons came in the days of his flesh. He is no more in the world, as to his bodily presence. Yet we may come to him spiritually, by faith and prayer. And, in the sufferings of this patient, we have an emblem of what we may meet with, as we are approaching. We can never seek him in vain : but our case may seem worse before relief arrives. We may be thrown down, and torn, in the way. God saw the affliction of Israel, and resolved to save them : but before they left Egypt, their bondage was more sorely felt ; and as soon as they had escaped, Pharaoh pursued them, and hemmed them in. As

long as people remain regardless of Christ, the enemy keeps them in peace; but when they begin to inquire in earnest after him, then commences the conflict; and this is the language of many an applicant, as "he is coming"—"O my God! my soul is cast down within me."

Some of his difficulties and discouragements may arise from the opposition of friends and relations. Marvel not, said the Saviour, if the world hate you. We have no reason to believe our religion is the religion of the Bible, if it be palatable to the taste of carnal minds. How often, as soon as a man becomes decided, is he had in derision of all around him, and like one mocked of his neighbour! And is it not trying to proceed in a course that will break up connexions otherwise agreeable? and draw upon him their sneer or their laugh? their ridicule or their menaces?—Yet he must go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach. And he ought to rejoice that he is counted worthy to suffer shame for his Name. But every thing cannot be expected at first. The trial is greater when a man's foes are those of his own house; when the persecution comes from those he loves, and ought even to obey—only in the Lord. But the trial is greatest, at least to a grateful and ingenuous mind, when the persecution results, not from violence and threatenings; but from kindness, and entreaties, and tears. Yet, through all this he must press—"He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me—and he that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple."

Sometimes the coming soul has difficulties arising from ignorance of the method of salvation. These

indeed will not remain long, when the heart is brought into a proper state, and the man cries, What must I do to be saved? But some are alarmed before they are enlightened: as a person may be awakened in the dark, and not know which way to flee from the evil. Or as a patient may be sensible of the danger of his disease, before he knows the physician or the remedy. Some have not had parents who taught them the truth, as it is in Jesus; and they have no access to evangelical preaching; and they are not blessed with such Christian companions as can guide their feet into the path of peace. What wonder, therefore, if such, for awhile, should betake themselves (for something, in such cases, will be done—they cannot sit still) to improper expedients, and self-righteous means of relief? For all legalists are not of the same kind. Some are such from disposition; and these are the bitterest adversaries of the Gospel; and, the presentation of the truth to them only draws forth their enmity. But others are such from want of better information only; and when they find the light, they rejoice in it—"This is what my soul was following hard after—O that I had known it earlier; and, instead of working like a slave, had believed on him that justifieth the ungodly; and, instead of attempting to build up a wretched shelter of my own, I had only fled for refuge to the hope set before me!"

Allied to this is another discouragement the coming sinner feels, springing from doubts and fears, when he does perceive the way, and is informed that there is salvation in no other. Pressed down with such a sense of his unworthiness, and with such views of the number and heinousness of his sins as

he never had before, he is ready to conclude that such immense blessings cannot be for *him*; and that *his* claiming them would be no better than presumption. Let not such a desponding soul refuse to be comforted. Let him ask — What recommendation had Manasseh? Where am *I* excluded from hope? Does he not say, Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth? If I have nothing with which to purchase, am I not invited to “buy without money, and without price”?

An apprehension, too, of the arduous duties of the Christian life, is frequently very dismaying. The Scripture tells him that this life is a building and a warfare—a very expensive building, and a very awful warfare; and enjoins him, before he begins, to count the cost of the one, and the resources of the other. He does this; and feels himself perfectly inadequate to both. And so he may feel, and ought to feel: for when he is poor, then he is rich; and when he is weak, then he is strong. But fear not, says the Saviour; for I am with thee. My grace is sufficient for thee. As thy days so shall thy strength be. “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.”

Finally. There are things among the professors of religion which often perplex and scandalize young converts. Such are the diversities of opinion among them. And such their alienation from each other, because of their little distinctions. And such the falls of some. And the backslidings of others. Older and wiser Christians know how to account

for all this without shaking their faith and hope—though it is always grievous even to them: but the weak find them stumbling blocks, over which they often fall. For which reason, the Apostle says to the believing Hebrews, “Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way: but let it rather be healed.”

Two things must now be fixed in the mind. The one is—that whatever would impede our coming to Christ, is from Satan; and should be resisted accordingly. The other is—that, whatever difficulties we may encounter, come to him we must. It is not a matter of indifference—It is the one thing needful—we perish without it. “Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.”

DECEMBER 8. MORNING.

“If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.”
2 Cor. xi. 30.

WE may consider these infirmities under two classes.

First; as outward and natural. Thus they include bodily weaknesses and indispositions. Some, by reason of a healthful and firm constitution, know little of these infirmities, and can scarcely sympathize with those who are the subjects of them. But Paul was no stranger to them. I was with you, says he to the Corinthians, in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. They also include all other external afflic-

tions; whatever lowers a man's condition, and weakens him in the opinion of the world, who always judge after outward appearances. If it were necessary to prove this, we might refer to the Apostle's sufferings, as recorded in the preceding verses, and to which he obviously alludes: and also to what he immediately subjoins, as an illustration, in his escape from Damascus, by the wall in a basket; and the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him—ending with his noble avowal; "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong."

There is something wonderful in this. For all these things are viewed as disadvantages, and give rise to emotions of grief and shame, rather than of joy and glory. People glory in their beauty—not in their deformity: in their strength—not in their weakness: in their dignity—not in their meanness: in their praise—not in their disgrace: in their successes—not in their disappointments. But Paul says, "If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities." Let us make a distinction here. Absolutely considered, these things are evils in themselves; and it does not become a Christian to pray for them, or go out of his way to meet with them. But when he is called to suffer them according to the will of God, he should remember that there are purposes to be answered by them, which render them *relatively* valuable and excellent. If medicine be regarded only as to its taste, we say it is offensive, and we should decline it: but when the necessity and usefulness of it are perceived, and we think of the health to be restored, and the life to be prolonged by

it, we not only consent to take it, but even thankfully pay for the otherwise disagreeable remedy. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." So it is here: Paul glories in things which *concern* his infirmities. What are these? We may consider them as preservatives or preventions. Thus, when Israel was going astray after her lovers, says God, "I will hedge up her way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not be able to find her paths." And as restorers—Thus David says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." I was sick; he bled me; and I recovered. And as probations—to evince and display the reality and degree of our religion; the tenderness of God's care; the supports of his grace; and the truth of his word. Of this quality were Job's sufferings. And as preparatives—for usefulness here, and heaven hereafter. How these views of faith are sufficient to alter our estimate of the dispensation, and to change our feelings under it!

But, secondly; we may consider these infirmities as inward and spiritual. Thus they comprise all those weaknesses and deficiencies of grace under which the best now labour; and which lead them to pray, "Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us." Something is wanting in their faith, hope, courage, patience, and spiritual understanding. Even Paul could say, I have not attained; I am not already perfect. But are not these infirmities matter of humiliation, rather than of glorying? Yes; and the believer blushes and groans over them. Nor will an apprehension of his security reconcile him to his re-

maining imperfections. Yea, a persuasion of God's constant love towards him will induce him the more to bewail them. Yet there are things which *concern* these infirmities, for which he feels thankful, and in which he rejoices. Four of these may be mentioned.

First. The means of grace are things which concern our infirmities. They are rendered necessary by them, and are designed to relieve them. In heaven they are laid aside: there they are needless. But the Christian now cries, Send us help from the sanctuary and strengthen us out of Zion. And by waiting upon the Lord he renews his strength.

Secondly. The promises are things which concern our infirmities. "To him that hath shall be given." "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." When we read all this, let the weak say, I am strong. But for these assurances we must despond: but now we read, and go on; read, and fight on; read, and suffer on. We rejoice at his word, as one that findeth great spoil.

Thirdly. The influences of the Spirit are things which concern our infirmities. How is a Christian to live or walk? He lives in the Spirit, and walks in the Spirit. How does he pray? In the Holy Ghost. "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God." Observe the ground of the Apostle's hope, with regard to himself, in the issue of

all his sufferings: "I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." And with him there is a rich abundance; and in him all fulness dwells; and to him we have always a free and invited access.

Fourthly. The last thing that concerns our infirmities is the removal of them by death. A certain removal. A removal nigh at hand. An entire removal—Every one of them will be done away with—and for ever.

DECEMBER 8.—EVENING.

"One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

JOHN ix. 25.

THE change with which this poor man had been blessed corporeally is the spiritual experience of every real Christian—He was blind, but now sees.

And like him too the Christian may *know it*.

We may also observe a resemblance in the *limitation* of the knowledge itself—It extends to *one* thing: "One thing I know that, whereas I was blind, now I see." But this is the main thing; and to know this is to know enough, without being able to determine a number of particular circumstances. For instance: it is not necessary to know the precise time of the change. Who knows precisely when the day begins, or which be the first beams that reach our horizon? Yet one thing we know, that the sun is rising: it is dawn, it is day. We know when spring is arrived; and yet who can fix the exact boundary by which it passed from winter, and the hour, the day, the week, when it will issue in summer? unless in the artificial-

ness of the almanack. Who perceived when he first began to live naturally? yet every one knows that he hungers and thirsts, and eats and drinks, and lives, moves, and has a being.

Neither is it necessary to be able to know the particular instrumentality employed: whether an afflictive event, or a good book, or the admonition of a friend, or the preaching of the word. Sometimes there is such a combination and blending of excitements and impressions, that it is impossible to specify which, in the aggregate, was the most powerful or decisive. Whatever be the means, and they are various, the excellency of the power is of God; and it is enough for us to know that the work is done, and to acknowledge that he has done it.

To which we may add, the manner in which it has been accomplished. In some cases it is more sudden; in others, more slow. The Lord addresses one man in thunder; he whispers to another in a small still voice. Here he awakens fear and terror; there he draws with the bands of a man and the cords of love. What a difference was there between the conversion of the jailor, and the opening of the heart of Lydia; and between the revelation of the Saviour to Saul of Tarsus, and to Cornelius! Yet in all these instances the result was the same. Two inferences may be drawn from hence.

The one regards others. How careful should we be not to disown persons as religious characters, and keep them back from the table of the Lord, because they are unable to furnish a minute narrative of the dealings of God with their souls, while they walk as becometh the Gospel!

The other regards ourselves. It is better indeed

to err on the safe side; and to be too fearful rather than self-secure. It is an awful thing to decide on our spiritual condition; and, considering the consequences of mistake, should never be done without much consideration. Yet, on the other hand, decision is unspeakably desirable, and we should not refuse to be comforted; and, under a feeling of humility and diffidence, become ungrateful, and deny what God has wrought in us. We are commanded to examine ourselves, and to prove whether we are in the faith. But this is best done, not by nice and curious inquiries with regard to the influences of the Holy Spirit; but by observing the tendency of their operation, and judging by their effects—And happy is he who, whatever he may be ignorant of besides, can say, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

And remark what a confidence the man derived from his consciousness of this one thing. These unbelievers wished and endeavoured to confound; but their questions and their cavils had no weight with *him*. He did not consider himself competent to dispute with them; nor did he attempt to consider every objection their prejudices urged—But he had—he felt one invincible, undeniable argument—"This," says he, "is sufficient for me." You say, he is a sinner—Is it likely a sinner would be so honoured of God as he has been? Since the world began it was not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man was not of God he could do nothing. This, however, I must leave with you—I know what he has done for me, and cannot be mistaken—whether he be a sinner I know not; "one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

A Christian indeed is not an enthusiast. He despises no kind of evidence; and he wishes that his religion may always appear what it really is, a reasonable service. But he that believeth hath the witness in himself. Like this man, he has a satisfaction derived from experience. He has received the truth in the love and efficiency of it. He has felt its power and blessedness. Such a man could be safely trusted among infidels. They may scoff, and ridicule; they may even perplex him; but they cannot induce a conviction contrary to his views and feelings. He has a certainty, out of which he can neither be laughed nor reasoned. His heart is established with grace. And thus also he is secure, not only from infidelity, but heresy; and cannot be drawn away from the truth as it is in Jesus, or the peculiar doctrines of Divine grace. With him they are not mere notions, but principles. They are spirit and they are life. They sanctify, quicken, refresh his soul. If a man who sees could be introduced among a people entirely blind, they would consider him a liar or a madman, when he told them what he saw. Yet, though he would not condemn them because of their blindness, but feel pity instead of pride, he would be in no danger of yielding to their opinion: he would know that he spoke the words of truth and soberness—He would know that, though they were blind, he saw.

This also qualifies a man for dealing with others in Divine things. It excites his zeal, and enables him to speak with earnestness, because he can speak without hesitation or doubt. "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good." "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us:

and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

This also yields him a prop against despair, and a cordial under discouragement. He feels that he is far from what he ought to be, and wishes to be. "I have much," says he, "to humble me; but I am not without cause for thankfulness. He *has* made me to differ from others, and from myself once. I *know* he has enabled me to see the evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, the worth of his grace. I know I love his salvation; and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord—And if he were pleased to kill me, he would not have shewn me such things as these."

DECEMBER 9.—MORNING.

"I am a burden to myself." Job vii. 20.

AND perhaps this is not all—perhaps you are a burden to others also.

—But we will leave this; and inquire whether you are a burden to yourself. We may put the complaint into the mouth of four classes.

It is sometimes the language of the afflicted. Thus it was the exclamation of Job. We talk of trouble! He could say, "Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow." Read the affecting relation; dwell on all the dismal items; and wonder not that *he* should say, "I am a burden to myself." If we cannot approve of the strength of his complaint, we hardly know how to condemn it. God himself overlooks it; and only holds him forth as an example of patience. All sufferers cannot, indeed, say truly, as

he did, "My stroke is heavier than my groaning." Yet the heart's bitterness is known only to itself. We cannot determine the pressure of another's mind under suffering: for the feeling of affliction may be actually much greater than we should have supposed from the degree of it. But afflictions may be great in themselves, from their number, and frequency, and suddenness, and subject. Is this thy case? Yield not to impatience and despondency. Such afflictions have often introduced a train of mercies; and the valley of Achor has been a door of hope. How many in heaven, how many on earth, are now thanking God for their trials! He knows how to deliver. Say—"Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee."

It is sometimes the language of the disengaged and idle. None so little enjoy life, and are such burdens to themselves, as those who have nothing to do—for

"A want of occupation is not rest—

A mind quite vacant is a mind distress'd."

Such a man is out of God's order; and opposing his obvious design in the faculties he has given him, and the condition in which he has placed him. Nothing, therefore, is promised in the Scripture to the indolent. Take the indolent with regard to exertion—What indecision! What delay! What reluctance! What apprehension! "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without; I shall be slain in the streets." "The way of a slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain." Take him, with regard to health—What sluggishness of circulation! What depression of spirits! What dul-

ness of appetite! What enervation of frame! Take him, with regard to temper and enjoyment—Who is pettish and fretful? Who feels wanton and childish cravings? Who is too soft to bear any of the hardships of life? Who broods over every little vexation and inconvenience? Who not only increases real, but conjures up imaginary evils? and gets no sympathy from any one in either? Who feels time wearisome and irksome? Who is devoured by ennui and spleen? Who oppresses others with their company, and their questions, and censorious talk? The active only have the true relish of life. He who knows not what it is to labour, knows not what it is to enjoy. Recreation is only valuable as it unbends us; the idle know nothing of it. It is exertion that renders rest delightful, and sleep sweet and undisturbed. That the happiness of life depends on the regular prosecution of some laudable purpose or lawful calling, which engages, helps, and enlivens all our powers, let those bear witness who, after spending years in active usefulness, retire to *enjoy themselves*. Prayers should always be offered up for their servants and wives—and for themselves too. They are a burden to themselves.

It is the language of the wicked. Not always, indeed: but much oftener than they are willing to own. It may not come from them in the circle of their companions; but it is sighed out in private, when the charm of amusement has ceased, and conscience tries to be heard. They may pretend (for hypocrisy is not confined to religion) to be peaceful; but they know that one thought of God is sufficient to destroy all the calm. They may profess to admire the world; but they know it affords them no

satisfaction. They know they return jaded from all their excursions of avarice, ambition, and sensuality, still asking, Who will shew us any good? They know that, in this uncertain state, they are always trembling for the idols of their hearts: that they look for no support in trouble; and dread the approach of death, to the fear of which they are all their lifetime subject to bondage. Sin and sorrow are inseparable. God himself has told us that the way of transgressors is hard, and that there is no peace to the wicked. Many sins bring their own punishments along with them. Envy is the rottenness of the bones. "Pride is restless as the wind." What a torment is the spirit of revenge! What must be the apprehension of the thief? and the terror of the murderer? What the remorse of a villain who has seduced a fellow-creature from the path of virtue, and made her ignominious and wretched for life! What the feelings of a drunkard, who has ruined his business, and covered his wife and children with rags! How often does the sinner become the contempt of the neighbourhood! How often does he contract infirmities and diseases, which lie down with him in the dust! Yes; *he* may well say, I am a burden to myself! and, to get rid of the intolerable load, he not rarely lays violent hands upon himself; saying, with Cain, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

It may be the language of the godly. We mean, not only or principally as they are afflicted—then they would coincide with the first class of complainants. Many indeed are the afflictions of the righteous, and they are not required to be insensible under them. But there are things which they feel more painfully

than outward trouble. The temptations of Satan—A world lying in wickedness—The imperfections of their graces—The remains of corruption within them—Wanderings in duty—An evil heart of unbelief—Distrust of their best Friend—The grievings of his Holy Spirit. Another cannot enter into all this; it requires the feelings of a renewed mind: but this induces the believer to say, "I loathe it, I would not live always." O wretched man that I am! said Paul; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Is there any relief? The very experience is a token for good. Your case is not peculiar. All your brethren, while in this tabernacle, groan too, being burdened. You will not be a burden to yourself always. You now say, Behold, I am vile: wherefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes. But you will soon be reconciled to yourselves, without pride. Your knowledge will be without obscurity. Your services without imperfection. Your pleasure without pain. And He who is now keeping you from falling, will present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

DECEMBER 9.—EVENING.

"He shall see of the TRAVAIL OF HIS SOUL, and shall be satisfied."

ISAIAH liii. 11.

THIS verse contains an epitome of the whole chapter; and the chapter contains an epitome of the whole Gospel. For what is the Gospel—but "the testimony of Jesus"? And what does this testimony essentially include—but "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow"? And if "the angels desire to look into these things," how much more should we, to whom they are not only true, and

wonderful, and sublime, but infinitely important and necessary! Let me therefore indulge in three meditations on this all-interesting subject.

The allusion is obvious. "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." A comparison should never be pressed beyond its lawful bounds. The attempt made to force too much out of it, not only renders it absurd, but weakens it, and the spirit flies off evaporated in particles. It should suffice here to observe, that there is a strong and striking resemblance between the delivered mother and the risen Saviour. In each case there is suffering. In each case the suffering is followed by pleasure. And in each case the pleasure is deemed the recompence of the suffering—The birth of the child repays the throes of the mother; and the salvation of the Church satisfies the Saviour: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied." The TRAVAIL OF HIS SOUL—

From ignorance, and the degree of interest which things acquire in their relation to ourselves, every sufferer is prone to think that *his* endurings are peculiar and superior. Jesus could say, with infinite propriety, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, where-with the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." Two things here intimate the greatness of his passion. First, the term by which it is expressed. "Travail"—not trouble—but "travail." And secondly, the principal seat of it; "his soul."—"The travail of his *soul*." The distress of the soul is the soul of distress.

Some persons are not qualified to enter into a comparison between corporeal and mental affliction. They are a kind of human animals. They are masses of flesh and blood. They have senses, and passions, and appetites; and little else. They lie down and rise up; they sleep and awake; they hunger and thirst—But they never suffer unless when they have nothing to eat, or when they cry out with bodily pain. They are strangers to all that interior of woe which to feeling minds renders the world a wilderness, more than the thorns and briers without. “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity: but a wounded spirit who can bear?” While all is calm and firm within, external trials are borne with comparative ease. *Then* we may be “troubled on every side, yet not distressed;” like a ship in the sea, which does not sink by the water around it, but only by what gets through and gets in.

But there are some who have not only “fightings without,” but “fears within.” *They* know what inward anguish and depression mean. Ah! says David, “my bones are vexed; my soul is also sore vexed”—“O my God, my soul is cast down within me.” And how was it with his Son, whom he yet in spirit calls his Lord? His sufferings were the “travail of his soul.” Not that he was free from other afflictions. With regard to outward distresses, he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. But even his external sufferings derived much of their pressure from the sensibility of his mind, for he was all feeling. Some are little affected even with bereavements; but he, at the grave of Lazarus, groaned in spirit and wept. Some seem careless of reputation; but he said, “Reproach hath broken my heart.”

Some when "stricken" are not "grieved," and "have made their faces harder than a rock;" but he, "in the days of his flesh, made supplications with strong cryings and tears." But what led him to exclaim on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What made him in the garden, before the hand of man had yet touched him, to be "sore amazed and very heavy"? What led him to say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death"? while "his sweat was it were drops of blood falling to the ground"?

"The thought of his approaching crucifixion," say some. If so, what becomes of the pre-eminence of his example? We can fetch many from history who had to endure more torturing and lingering agonies—and yet they rejoiced in the prospect, left their prisons singing, kissed the instrument of their pain, and thanked the executioner. How did Bradford, when informed that he was to be burnt at the stake the following day, fall upon his knees and praise God for an honour he had so long waited for? When a popish priest said to Hooper at the place of execution, "I am truly sorry to find you here;" the martyr replied, "O man, keep thy sorrow to thyself, and mourn over thine own wickedness. I am well blessed by God, and to die for the sake of Christ is sweet to my soul." Is then the servant above the master, or the disciple above his Lord? Here—and we will venture to say, here alone can be found a complete and satisfactory solution. They had Calvary before them, but not Gethsemane. They had to endure the cross, but not the curse. They died by men, but not for them. They had not to bear the sins of many: they had not to

bear their own sins—not one of their own sins—or they would have sunk down under the burden. But he bare our sins in his own body on the tree. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. HIS SOUL WAS MADE AN OFFERING FOR SIN.

DECEMBER 10.—MORNING.

"He SHALL SEE of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."

ISAIAH liii. 11.

SOMETHING therefore was to be *derived* from the travail of his soul. It was the salvation of sinners. To shew that this infinite good results from his suffering, he compares his dying to the sowing of seed, which *dies* and *then* produces. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Here we are reminded of our obligations to him. If we are reconciled unto God, it is by the death of his Son: if we are redeemed from the curse of the law, it is because he was made a curse for us. The blessing, though free to us, was beyond expression expensive to him. He accomplished it, not by a mere volition of his will, or an exertion of his power, but by his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross.

"He sunk beneath our heavy woes,
To raise us to his throne;
There's not a gift his hand bestows,
But cost his heart a groan."

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!

While this blessedness is the travail of his soul, so we find we can enjoy the *sight* of it. A child, when born, may be spared, and may grow up, and be acknowledged as the offspring of her who bare him; but if she dies, though others see the travail of the mother, she herself does not. She is laid low in the dust; and in vain her infant goes to her grave—His cries, if oppressed, cannot reach her ears; nor, if well treated, can the news gladden her heart—Her son comes to honour, but she knoweth it not; and he is brought low, but she perceiveth it not of him. So it was with Rachel: "Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not: thou shalt have this son also." And she had a son, and he became a patriarch, and the head of a tribe; but she *saw* it not: for she only sighed out a name expressive of her disappointment and sorrow—she called his name Benoni, and expired. So would it have been with Jesus had he not rose and revived. Whatever blessings he procured for us by dying, he could not have seen the application and enjoyment of them, had he remained in the grave. But he could not be holden of it. It was said of him, He shall live. A seed shall serve him. And he shall *see* his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

For there is a certainty in his realizing this vision—"He *shall see* of the travail of his soul." It is often spoken of as a reward insured by promise and stipulation. Thus it is said; "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the

strong, because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Let it not be objected that he himself says, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain." For here he complains as the moral agent, as the preacher of the word, as the minister of the circumcision. But this does not apply to the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure. This would not allow of his suffering at an uncertainty. Having performed the awful condition, it would have been unfaithful in God to have withholden the remuneration suspended upon it; especially as he died in reliance upon it, and in expectation of it. It was the joy set before him, for which he endured the cross, and despised the shame.—To which we may add, that he is fully in the possession of resources sufficient to enable him to acquire all his rights, and realize all his wishes. As yet we see not all things put under him; but we see him, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour. We see him with power over all flesh: with all power in heaven and in earth—able therefore to counteract all the designs of his enemies, and to make them subservient to the accomplishment of his own—able to take the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession—able to subdue Paganism, and the false prophet, and the man of sin—able to take away the veil from the heart of the Jews, and induce them to look upon him whom they have pierced, and to mourn for him—able to root up in his churches every plant which his heavenly Father hath not planted—able to increase a thousandfold all the excellences and

usefulness of his people. "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron." "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound."

DECEMBER 10.—EVENING.

"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and SHALL BE SATISFIED."

ISAIAH lli. 11.

NOTHING is more trying and mortifying than to labour without success, especially when great difficulties are encountered, and great sacrifices incurred. But how pleasing it is to the husbandman, after manuring, and ploughing, and sowing, to go forth and see, first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear: and, when he has borne the burden and heat of the day in harvest, to behold the precious grain safely housed in the garner! How delightful must it be to the warrior, after his marchings, and privations, and all the perils of the field, to return home in peace, and enjoy the spoils and rewards of victory! Or take the image to which Isaiah refers. How is the mother recompensed for her pain when she sees—a living child—her own—the pledge of mutual affection—the wearer of the father's name and image—an endeared creature depending upon herself—to be fed at her bosom—to be dandled on her knee—to be aided by her in all his attempts to walk and speak—a rational being unfolding new powers—and preparing for usefulness in the commu-

nity—and who, unless he be a wretch, will pronounce no word through life with half the feeling he will say, “My mother!” But there have been days wherein it was said, “Blessed is the womb that bare not, and the paps that never gave suck.” Many a “Rachel is weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are not.” Many an early grave is inscribed with “Childhood and youth are vanity.” But the pleasure of the Lord Jesus is liable to no such disappointment—“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be SATISFIED.”

Let us dwell for a moment on this satisfaction. What can be so animating and improving? Paul says to the Thessalonians, “Ye are our glory and joy.” Yet he and his brethren were only ministers by whom they believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. But if converts are the glory and joy of those who are only the instruments of their salvation, in how much higher a degree must they be so to him who is the sole author of it! When the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them, “He spake this parable unto them. What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.” We need not say, that this shepherd who, instead of complaining of his wearisome and painful search, only exults in his success, is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. When he came to the well he was not only thirsty, but hungry, and therefore his disciples went away into the city to buy meat. When they returned they spread it before him, saying, “Master,

eat"—But he said unto them, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Upon which, looking at each other and wondering, they said, "Hath any man brought him aught to eat?" He then said, "My disciples, since you left me I have had an opportunity to enlighten and convert, by my grace, a poor sinful wretch who came here to draw water: and she has left her vessel for my use; and is gone into the city, to tell her neighbours; and is, as you see yonder, returning over the plain with a large number, who will receive my doctrine and become my followers. Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. Ah! my disciples, this is food! There is no repast like the satisfaction of doing good—My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

And when he sees the travail of his soul, is he SATISFIED? Then behold his benevolence. The world knew him not: his own received him not. They persecuted him through life, and at length hung him on a tree. But God raised him from the dead, and he obtained the means by which he could revenge himself—and it is said revenge is sweet. And it is sweet to a brute. It is sweet to a demon. But it is not sweet to a Christian mind. But it is sweet to exercise mercy, to pass by a transgression, to overcome evil with good. So Jesus derived his satisfaction, not from the punishment of his enemies, but from their pardon, and deemed their happiness a recompence for all his sufferings.

Then we see the worth and importance of the salvation of the soul. We cannot always infer the value

of a thing from the pleasure it yields. Little things please little minds. We read of some who rejoice in a thing of nought. We know how men make gold their hope, and fine gold their confidence; and yet a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth. When therefore a work is performed we wish to know the opinion of one who is a perfect judge—Is he satisfied with it? It is a strong proof of the importance of salvation that the angels of God rejoice over one sinner that repenteth: for we cannot imagine that a mere trifle would throw into ecstasy those beings who are proverbial for their knowledge. But it is a stronger proof still that it is the satisfaction of our divine Redeemer himself. O that we estimated our souls as he estimates them! Every thing else would appear less than nothing and vanity compared with their salvation.

Then we may enlarge our notions of the number of the saved. True benevolence is the most encroaching thing in the world. A generous heart is never satisfied: it is always planning, always desiring to do something more. And would *his* soul, which is compassion itself, be satisfied with a few that should be saved? How many must be made partakers of the benefit before he stays the process of mercy, and says, It is enough! If no more are called, I am satisfied! But it is in reference to his claim and his disposition, that he is told by promise that his seed shall be as the stars of heaven, as the sand on the seashore, and as drops of dew.

Then here is encouragement for faith and hope. Under a sense of unworthiness and guilt persons often fear whether he will receive them. But does he not invite them to come, and command them to come;

and does he not complain that they will not come—yea, does he not assure them that it would yield him pleasure? We can therefore plead with you *his* interest as well as your *own*. You have offended him enough, grieved him enough; and surely if there be any thing by which you can yield him satisfaction, you are bound to do it. Let him then see you at his feet, and hear you crying, Lord, save, I perish!—This will charm him as much as the songs of angels—It is the travail of his soul, and when he sees it he is satisfied.

Then we have here a noble example to follow. Let the same mind be in us. Let his joy be fulfilled in ourselves. Let us spare no pains, let us grudge no sacrifices, in order to be useful. And let the satisfaction arising from it be our reward—"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

DECEMBER 11.—MORNING.

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." *Rev. i. 10.*

THIS proves how early, among Christians, one day in the week was distinguished from the rest. And it is obvious, that the day thus distinguished was the *first* day of the week; for no other is ever styled "the Lord's day" in the New Testament, or by any of the ancient writers. It is called "the Lord's day," not only by way of distinction, but excellency: being appropriated to his service, and consecrated to his honour, as the day of his resurrection from the

dead, and of entering into his rest from the works of redemption.

To be in the Spirit often signifies to be inspired, or to receive communications immediately from God; and it is certain that John was thus honoured. But the phrase may be used in reference to a spirituality of mind: and doubtless John experienced this also; and it prepared him for the sublime discoveries he was favoured with. Though miracles have ceased, the Spirit is still given in his ordinary influences; and if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. We are required to pray in the Holy Ghost; to worship God in the Spirit; to live and walk in the Spirit. Hence the common notion of our being in the Spirit on the Lord's day is perfectly scriptural. But we must distinguish between our being in the Spirit and the Spirit being in us. The latter denotes the reality of his influence, the former the abundance. Thus we say, a man is in love, or in liquor, or in a passion—to intimate that he is entirely seized and governed by it. We are not only to possess the Spirit, but to be possessed by it—"Be ye filled with the Spirit." It is not enough for us to be in a spiritual state; we must be also in a spiritual frame.

We must not, however, confine the import of this expression as some do. They never think of their being in the Spirit on the Lord's day but when they are relieved, comforted, delighted. We love feeling in religion; but religious feelings are many and various. It is desirable to pass the Sabbath in liveliness, liberty, and joy: and we read of the Spirit of life; and of a free Spirit; and of the comforts of the Holy Ghost. But a mournful Sabbath may be a very

profitable one; and we are never more in the Spirit than when we are deeply sensible of our unworthiness; and exclaim, at the foot of the Cross, Behold, I am vile; and hunger and thirst after righteousness. For, is he not the Spirit of truth? the convincer of sin? the Spirit of grace and of supplication? And does he not lead us to look upon him whom we have pierced, and to mourn for him?

Who does not know by experience that the day and the Spirit are not always thus united? Who has not had Sabbaths devoid of all proper religious affections? This should be a matter of deep humiliation. How piercing should be the thought of a lost Sabbath! Lost, never to return! Lost, yet to be accounted for! But what is a dull and formal attendance on the services of the season without those influences which the day requires, and is in itself adapted to produce?

As the richest Sabbath, with regard to means and ordinances, may be passed without the Spirit; so we may be in the Spirit on the Lord's day when the day is attended with few or none of these advantages. Was it not thus with the beloved disciple? Oh! there are Sabbaths when every thing is attractive: when we go to the house of God in company; when our eyes see our teachers; when our ears hear the joyful sound of salvation by grace! But John's Sabbath was a day of suffering, of privation, of exile, of solitude, in a desert isle—

“ Where the sound of the church-going bell
Those rocks and those valleys ne'er heard;
Never sigh'd at the sound of a knell,
Or smiled when a Sabbath appear'd.”

But heaven was opened unto him; and perhaps he never had such a Sabbath on earth before. A Christian may never be less alone than when alone. His consolations may equal, yea, exceed his sufferings. While his body is fettered, his soul may range in all the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Yes; you may be in the Spirit on the Lord's day, when denied the privileges of the sanctuary. If you keep away, from indifference, or indolence, or to save expense, when you have the ability to procure accommodation; or from any of those excuses which would detain you from nothing else; you have no reason to expect the Divine sanction. But sometimes travelling, even on the Lord's day, by land or by water, may be unavoidable. Or accident, or disease, or infirmity, or age, may confine you. In which case, the Lord will not despise his prisoners. And they shall know the blessedness of those whose strength is in him, and in whose hearts are the ways of them. It is better to want opportunity and power than the will, when we serve him who looketh at the heart. Nothing can be a substitute for him. But he is a substitute for every thing. And he is always accessible. And "if ye, being evil, know how to give good things unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!"

DECEMBER 11.—EVENING.

"And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends."
JOB xlii. 10.

JOB was once the greatest man in the East. But he was stripped of every thing, except life; and became, as a sufferer, proverbial for ever. How long

his calamities continued we cannot determine. At length, however, the shadow of death was turned into the morning. His troubles were all removed; his losses all repaired; and his latter end blessed more than his beginning. Hence says the Apostle James, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

His state of affliction is called "his captivity." Did then the Chaldeans and Sabeans, when they robbed him, make him also a prisoner? The term is metaphorical. Yet there is a striking reality, as the foundation of it. By the permission of Providence, Satan, for a while, had him in his possession, to go as far as he pleased, in destroying his substance, and afflicting his body. In consequence of this, a troop of woes seized him; and his feet, as he said, were made fast in the stocks. David, also, expresses himself much in the same way: "Bring my soul out of prison"—He despiseth not his prisoners. A state of affliction is not only unpleasant, but confining. Losses in property abridge a man of his former excursions of pleasure, and curtail his entertainments. Sickness arrests a man, and leads him away from company and business, and confines him to a bed of languishing. It detains a good man from the sanctuary; and when he thinks of his former freedom and privileges, he pours out his soul in him: for he had gone to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day.

His deliverance was of the Lord—"The Lord turned again his captivity." "He that is our God, is the God of salvation: and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." Some ascribe their

deliverances to chance ; some, to the favour of their fellow-creatures ; some, to their own wisdom and care : but this is no better than idolatry. Faith will lead us to see and acknowledge the agency of God's hand, whatever means may have been employed. And till God command deliverance, vain is the help of man. "Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again : he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening." But *he* knows how to deliver : and when his time is come, he not only can, but he will make a way for our escape. "Therefore," says the Church, "I will look unto the Lord ; I will wait for the God of my salvation : my God will hear me."

But it is peculiarly worthy of our remark, that the deliverance was accomplished, "when he prayed for his friends." These friends had acted a very unkind part. They had not only mistaken his case, but charged him with hypocrisy, and loaded him with reproach. This was no easy thing to bear. He labours to convince them, but in vain. Yet he felt no resentment ; but even prayed for them ! This is the best thing we can do in such cases. It will keep us more than any thing else from the effects of unhallowed passion ; and enable us to comply with the command, "Love your enemies." We *cannot* love them *as* we love others ; but if we can sincerely pray for them, it is a proof that we love them in the sense of the injunction.

But we here see not only the forgiving temper of Job, but the efficacy of prayer. As it is said, The Lord turned again his captivity *when* he prayed for his friends, it would seem that the deliverance commenced while he was engaged in the exercise. This is no unusual thing : for, says God, "*While* they call

I will answer." But if it did not take place *in* the exercise, it followed *immediately after*. And thus it affords a proof, that he is a God hearing prayer. Thus it encourages us to come to the throne of his grace. And not only for ourselves, but for others also. And not only for their welfare, but our own. Not only because it may avail much for them, but also because it may be beneficial to ourselves. Thus Job's praying not only obtained pardon for his friends, but deliverance for himself! And though he had often prayed under his afflictions, the prayer honoured with his deliverance was not a personal, but a relative prayer.

Let us not forget this; and let us extend it to all other cases of beneficence. If we do no good to those who are the objects, we must do good to those who are the agents. It cannot be in vain, with regard to ourselves. Our prayer, if not successful, will return into our own bosom, and leave a blessing behind it. "Into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again."

DECEMBER 12.—MORNING.

"And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary sitting over against the sepulchre." MATT. xxvii. 61.

WHILE upon the Cross He hung,
The Marys near him stay'd;
And, when from the tree releas'd,
Beheld where he was laid:
Fearless to the place they ran;
All their hope was buried there;
And, with grief and wonder, sat
Before the sepulchre.

Love it was detain'd them here ;
And sacred was the spot ;
Soon the scene revived their faith,
And mem'ry ne'er forgot.
From the crowd *I* glad withdraw,
And, with them, to muse I'm come ;
And prefer, to Eden's bliss,
One tear, at such a tomb.

Here, within this grave, now sleeps
The best, the only Friend ;
Here the lips of Truth are seal'd,
And Mercy's journeys end.
Here, the light, the life of men
Is early quench'd and dead—
How deserveless now appear
All other tears I've shed !

Ah ! how low his sacred head
Reposes here for me !
And how deep, though once so rich,
Is now his poverty !—
Nought of earth, in life or death,
His own he ever knew :
Borrow'd was his place of birth ;
His grave was borrow'd too !

But what terrors seize my frame !
A trembling shakes the ground ;
And the door, though thrice secur'd,
Is now wide open found—
On the stone the angel sits,
And frowns the guards to flight ;
Yet his looks, and words, to me
Speak safety and delight.

“ He thou seekest is not here ;
Come, view his lonely bed ;
And, with haste, go tell his friends,
He's risen from the dead.”

—As I go, himself I meet :

“ All hail !” he greeting cries ;
 “ I have crush’d sin, death, and hell,
 And open’d Paradise.

“ I’m alive for evermore :

And all that mourns with thee,
 Like myself their Head, shall live,
 For evermore with me.”

’Tis enough—in every state
 This truth my hope revives ;
 And, should every comfort die,
 I know my Saviour lives.

DECEMBER 12.—EVENING.

“ O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.”

JER. x. 23.

JEREMIAH *knew* this. It was not with him a matter of opinion or conjecture, but of certainty ; and therefore he could address his conviction to God himself. “ But he was a prophet, and might have derived his confidence from an immediate inspiration.” We have no reason to believe this. He derived his persuasion from five sources, which lie open to ourselves.

First, *dependence*. We are not our own, and therefore the right of direction does not belong to us, but to another, in whom we live, and move, and have our being ; and who has an absolute claim to us.

Secondly, *ignorance*. Vain man would be wise, but he is born like a wild ass’s colt. His powers are exceedingly limited ; he is liable to a thousand prejudices and allusions ; and cannot be safely trusted

to discern and distinguish between good and evil, appearances and realities.

Thirdly, *observation*. Read all history. See the consequences of Lot's choosing the vale of Sodom, "because it was well watered." See the sin and embarrassment to which David was reduced, when he went to Gath; yet he was so convinced of the propriety of this fatal step, as to say, "There is nothing better for me to do." Look around you. What are you continually meeting with, not only in the conduct of men, but in the mistakes even of good men!

Fourthly, *experience*. Can any one look back upon life and attentively review the events that have befallen him; the enterprises in which he has been engaged, the anxieties, and hopes, and fears, and joys, and sorrows, which have excited and influenced him; and not be compelled to say, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"?

Lastly, *revelation*. Here we have the testimony of the only wise God himself frequently interposed and expressed in every kind of statement—"Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill: but time and chance happeneth to them all." "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?" "He performeth the thing that is appointed for me, and many such things are with him." "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

So true is the doctrine before us, And who does

not believe the truth of it? It is not the conviction we want, but the temper, the practice that becomes it, and which we might imagine would certainly be produced by it in rational creatures. But alas! these rational creatures are also depraved creatures; hence they see and approve better things and follow worse. Yet surely this knowledge should be a *principle*, and we ought to derive from it

Gratitude. Have we been preserved from the dangers to which we were once unknowingly exposed? Have we escaped the follies and evils into which wiser and better men than ourselves have fallen? Have we been sheltered and indulged in our course? Have we had comfort in our connexions, and success in our engagements? Let us not burn incense to ourselves, as if all this was owing to our own prudence, and caution, and care; but exclaim, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory; for thy mercy and thy truth's sake."

It should also yield *submission*. We may pray, with regard to an affliction, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me;" if we can add, with the Saviour, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Indeed we cannot know what the will of God is in any of our trials, till events discover it. But when it is discovered, we ought to bow to his pleasure; assured not only that he has a right to do what he will with his own, but that he is too righteous and kind to injure us, and knows infinitely better than we do what our welfare requires.

If too "the way of man is not in himself," it should check *presumptuousness*. This often appears in men with regard to their future expectations and

designs. But wisdom says, "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Hence James thus reproves a tradesman, not for any disposition to fraud and oppress, nor for the wish to improve his income; but for reckoning on the continuance of his being and his health, and success in business, as if no uncertainty could attend him, and forming his scheme without any consideration of God, on whom every thing relied: "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil." The certain rich man, whose ground brought forth plentifully, said, "This will I do; I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." This is what *he* said—"But *God* said, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

The fact should also teach us to *apply to God for direction* in serious and earnest prayer. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." He is able to do it: he is willing to do it; yea, he is engaged to do it if you repair with the case to him

‘I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.’

It is thus alone we can live happy in a miserable world, and be calm and confident in every disturbance or alarm. But this will enable the soul to dwell at ease. The remedy has been tried, and was never known to fail. It is of God’s own appointing and prescribing. “Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.” “Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.”

DECEMBER 13—MORNING.

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.”

PHIL. i. 9.

ACCORDING to this prayer, there is nothing in which we should abound more than love. It is the fulfilling of the Law. The end of the Gospel commandment. The bond of perfectness. Without it, whatever be our attainments, professions, or sacrifices, we are NOTHING.

Yet we are to abound in it *wisely*. This is not found in all religious characters. In one, we perceive zeal; in another, discretion. One is clear, but cold. Another is warm, but inconsiderate. If we could meet with an individual who, in his experience and practice, blended these qualities; who had the heart, as well as the head, and the head, as well as the heart, of the Christian; *he* would be the prayer

of the Apostle fulfilled—"I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment."

Our love does not thus abound when we do not distinguish between what is supreme and what is subordinate. There are things in religion which are essential, and things which are only circumstantial. Am I to lay as much stress upon the latter as upon the former? Is the form of the railing of a bridge to be compared with the foundation of the buttresses, or the key-stones of the arch? Is the finger, though useful, of the same importance to the continuance of life as the heart and the lungs? What is an article about church government, or the mode of administering an ordinance, compared with the doctrine of justification by faith, or redemption by the blood of Christ? I venerate a man who is all diligence to convert sinners from the error of their way, and save souls from death: but I cannot feel the same towards the zealot of bigotry, whose aim is to make proselytes to his own peculiarities; and who regards his community, not as a *part*, but as a *party*.

Persons may not be judicious in their devotional exercises. By the frequency of public attendances, they may exclude or abridge the duties of the family, or the closet. They may so lengthen out the worship at the domestic altar, as to produce, in children and servants, weariness and aversion. Persons may hazard their health, by going forth under bodily indisposition: forgetting that God requires mercy, and not sacrifice; and when *He* deprives us of the ability, he accepts the ready mind.

Nor does our love abound in knowledge and in all judgment, when it carries us out of our own places

and stations to be useful. Grace always gives us the desire to do good; but Providence must furnish the opportunities. We are not to be unruly, or break the ranks, as the word is; but to march orderly, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. The Lord puts us where we ought to be; and enjoins us to abide in our calling. There are, indeed, occasional deviations from this rule: but they are exceptions; and must be justified by their own circumstances. When Saul's courtiers reflected upon the Shepherd of Bethlehem, as a restless, ambitious young man, who wished to struggle out of obscurity into public life, he was conscious that he followed only the providence of God; and could make this appeal—"Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." But there is danger, not only of impatience but pride, in all changes attended with the hope of elevation; and surely it becomes a man to consult some one besides *himself* concerning such cases. A man, by acting unlawfully, may do good: but the result does not justify the means. Whatever excitements persons may have to act irregularly, they are upon the whole, far more useful by consistency. Their example, in the latter, *must* do good; but, in the former, it *may* lead astray. I have known men who have been stunned for life by striking their head against a pulpit. I have known preachers who have neglected their families, and left their children to rove wild in the streets or the field, while they were teaching in the villages. I have known females who have disregarded their husbands and household affairs, to run unseasonably after favourite ministers. "The wisdom of the prudent,"

says Solomon, "is to understand *his way*"—that is, what becomes *him* to do; whether as a master, or a servant; as a father, or a child; as rich, or as poor; in every relation and condition of life. Lord, what wilt thou have *me* to do?

Many err much in the discharge of the duties they owe to others. Reproof may be more than thrown away, owing to the manner in which it is applied. It is done in anger; but it should flow from the spirit of meekness. It is done in public; but we should tell our neighbour his fault alone. We should distinguish, also, between one disposition and another; and become all things to all men, if by any means we may gain some. He that winneth souls is wise. We must therefore walk in wisdom towards them that are without. Wisdom must regulate our discourse. We must know when to speak. What to speak. How to speak—"A word fitly spoken, is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." We shall not talk discouragingly before those that are weak in the faith; nor perplex them with doubtful disputations. We may give strong meat to strong men; but babes require milk.

We may also err in cases of charity. Since we cannot relieve all the necessitous, we must endeavour to ascertain the most proper objects. Alms may become immoral by encouraging vice or idleness. Religious societies are to be encouraged and supported; but God abhors robbery for a burnt-offering. And many an annual *printed* subscription robs, not only the tradesman, but the poor. Nothing is to incapacitate us to succour the domestic and personal distress which *Providence itself* brings immediately before us; and by which some sublimely pass, to attend public

DECEMBER 13.—EVENING

VI
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meetings. "Whoso hath this world's
his brother have need, and shutteth up
compassion from him, how dwelleth it
in him?"

These are not all the instances in
is to abound in knowledge and in all judgment. But
these are sufficient to shew us, that wisdom is profit-
able to direct. Wherefore let us not be unwise, but
understanding what the will of the Lord is. Let us
cultivate our minds. Let us faithfully review our
own conduct; and see where we have been mistaken.
Let us keep observation alive and awake. Let us
walk with wise men. Let us be familiar with the
Holy Scriptures, which can furnish us thoroughly unto
all good works. Let us often read and study the
Proverbs of Solomon. Let us constantly keep in
view the life of Jesus, who dealt prudently; and so
was exalted, and extolled, and was very high. Above
all, let us seek the Spirit of Truth—"If any of you
lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all
men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be
given him."

DECEMBER 13.—EVENING.

"And the princes offered for dedicating of the altar in the day that
it was anointed, even the princes offered their offering before the altar."

NUMB. vii. 10.

THESE princes, "heads of the houses of their
fathers," were twelve. Their offering individually
was this: "One silver charger, the weight thereof
was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl
of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary;
both of them were full of fine flour mingled with oil

for a meat-offering: one spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense: one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt-offering: one kid of the goats for a sin-offering: and for a sacrifice of peace-offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, five lambs of the first year."

Some of these articles were for immediate use; such as the animals to be slain in sacrifice for burnt-offerings, sin-offerings, and peace-offerings. Others were for fixed and standing use: such were the utensils to be employed in performing the service of the sanctuary. These were all of silver and gold. Was God to be served only in plate? The costliness was not for his pleasure, but for the sake of the people in an early and infantile state of the Church; to impress their imaginations; to remind them that he was "a great King;" and to teach them that they were to serve him with their best. The chargers were worth, in our money, sixteen pounds five shillings—the bowl, fifteen pounds—the spoon, or ladle, seven pounds ten shillings. It is not possible to determine the value of the two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, five lambs; but the presentation of two hundred and four of such animals, and three hundred pounds in silver, and seventy-five pounds in gold, was, at this period, and in their circumstances, a vast donation.

And here the first thing that strikes us is the capacity of these donors. We are amazed to think how they came by so much affluence, as to be able to spare for even one offering so much treasure. They had all been oppressed and plundered in Egypt; and they were now in a wilderness, without merchandise, trade, or agriculture. But, from whatever source, or in whatever way, their wealth had been acquired, they

had it: it was lawfully their own; they would not have been pious at the expense of justice; and they knew that God abhors robbery for burnt-offering. Those however who have riches, commonly resolve to keep them; and, as it is said that the ground is generally very barren about the silver and gold mines, so the wealthy often do less for the cause of God, not only comparatively, but really, than persons of less resources. But it was not so here. Who can help admiring the liberality of these men? And let it be observed, that they did this freely; they were not called upon to do it; it was not the effect of any excitement, but of the forwardness and willingness of their own minds. Nor was this the first time of shewing their generosity: it had been evinced in two instances before this. The first was when the tabernacle was in framing. "Then they gave onyx stones, and stones to be set, for the ephod, and for the breastplate; and spice and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense." These were things much valued, and which could not be easily replaced. When also the tabernacle was fully set up, and anointed and sanctified with all the instruments thereof, "they brought their offering before the Lord, six covered waggons and twelve oxen; a wagon for two of the princes, and for each one an ox; and they brought them before the tabernacle." Yet after this, immediately after this, they came forward again with the expensive donation before us.

With regard to this presentation we may remark three things. First, all the offerings were precisely the same in kind, quantity, and value. But were the donors equally rich? This is not likely. Yet they

were equally disposed; they felt an equal interest in the altar; and, to prevent mortification on one side, and pride on the other, by pre-eminence or inferiority, they had agreed upon this measure. We differ in our stations and in our means; but, though we do not give the same in fact, we may give the same in principle. The Lord looketh to the heart; and in his sight all who give proportionately give equally; and the poor may be as liberal as the rich.

Secondly. The offerings were not to be presented at once. The solemnity continued twelve days: "The Lord said unto Moses, They shall offer their offering, each prince on his day, for the dedicating of the altar." Wherefore was this? We are never more liable to mistakes than when we assign reasons for the conduct of the Supreme Being. Yet he has reasons for all he does. And may we not suppose that he would teach us to do every thing decently and in order? As the work of God should not be done in a careless, so neither in a hurried and confused manner. "Take time," says the proverb, "and you will have done the sooner;" and if not, you will surely have done "the better." May we not learn, also, that we are not to complain of the length and repetition of religious services? Here were twelve days of convocation immediately following each other. But did the pious Jews cry out, "What a weariness it is to serve the Lord!" When will the work be over? Those who love the things of God call them "their pleasant things;" and, in going from one ordinance to another, they only go from strength to strength. And when health, or the engagements of duty, keep them back from going with the multitude to the sanctuary,

in "their hearts are the ways of them." Again; By the protraction and the repetition of the services they would be more noticed, and more remembered by the people, and especially by their children. To which we may add, that thus an equal honor would be put upon each tribe. Each had his own standard in the army, each had his precious stone in the breastplate of Aaron, and each had a separate day for the presentation of his offering, according to the order in which they were to move, or encamp, beginning with Judah, and ending with Naphtali.

Thirdly, The account of each dedication is expressly given, and repeated in the very same words, without the least variation or abridgment. This swells the chapter to a great length. In reading it, perhaps we have sometimes been ready to think the sameness tiresome; and to say, this might easily have been avoided if the sacred historian, after the recital of the offering of the first prince's offering, had said, "and so did the remaining eleven." But there is no vain repetition in the Scriptures. God would shew that he was no respecter of persons; that he is not unrighteous to forget our work and labor of love; that a book is written before him, in which he records the services of *every* individual.

DECEMBER 14.—MORNING.

"I will say unto God, Do not condemn me." JOS. x. 1.

HE could have resolved on nothing better in his affliction than betaking himself to God. It was.

turning to him that smote him; and resembling the child, who, when corrected by the mother, always clings to her knee. We are too fond of taking our complaints to men—but

“Were half the breath, thus vainly spent,
To Heaven in supplication sent;
Our cheerful cry would oftener be—
Hear what the Lord has done for me!”

If I weep, says Job, “mine eye poureth out tears unto God;” and if I speak, “I will say unto God”—

But what does he say? “Do not condemn me.” Now there was no real ground for this fear. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Their sins, once pardoned, if sought for, shall never be found. And their afflictions, however distressing, have nothing penal in them: they are only like the fire to the gold, and pruning to the vine, and medicine to the patient, and correction to the child. We are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

But the language implies, that he knew God could charge him with guilt enough to condemn him, if he should deal with him after his desert. And every child of God feels this. In reviewing even the most innocent periods of his life, and the devoutest services in which he was ever engaged, he exclaims, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord: for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified.”

It shews us also, that a child of God is prone to fear the displeasure of God in his afflictions. The people of the world, as we see in the case of the barbarians, with regard to Paul’s viper; and the caution of our Lord, with regard to the men on whom the

tower of Siloam fell; deem their fellow-creatures sinners because they suffer such things. And, though we are much more disposed to judge others by this erroneous rule than ourselves, yet there is something in calamity, says Madame de Stael, that tends to make all minds superstitious. We would rather say, that tends to revive the remembrance of a Moral Providence, and the belief of a connexion between sin and punishment. And this is more the case when afflictions are sudden, and unlooked for, and great, and repeated, or have any thing that looks peculiar in them. And even good minds have not been able always to resist such impressions and conclusions. Gideon said, "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this evil befallen us?" And the pious widow of Zarephath, upon the loss of her child, "said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" The poet tells us, and very truly, "Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face;" but he does *hide* it. The frown is visible enough—sense can see this; but the smile can only be apprehended by faith;—and whose faith is always in exercise?

We may also remark, that gracious souls deprecate nothing so much as censure from God. Therefore they say unto God, "Do not condemn me. To any thing else I bow. But I cannot bear exclusion from thee. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth I desire besides thee. Thy loving-kindness is better than life. In thy presence all my happiness is placed. Use the rod of a father; but let me not feel the sentence of the judge. Correct me; but do not abandon me. Cast me not away from

thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

Nothing can relieve the gloom of a follower of God but the light of his countenance. Nothing can make melody in his troubled conscience but the sound, Go in peace; thy sins be forgiven thee. O seek such an assurance of divine favour before the evil days come, wherein you will say, we have no pleasure in them! If trouble—and man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward: if trouble—and you are not for a moment secure—should fall upon you before you have a good hope, through grace, that God is pacified towards you, your condition will be the most pitiable. You must either stupefy the mind with Satan's opiates, or faint in the day of adversity.

And let those who have it preserve and cherish this sense of divine favour and acceptance. Beware of grieving the Holy Spirit of God. Beware not only of sin, but of the world. Beware of sloth and sleep. Christian slept, and lost his roll out of his bosom. And while Saul slept, he was deprived of his spear and his cruse. When trouble comes, you should not have to seek what, above all things, you want immediately to use. Without his smiles, even in prosperity, your comforts will not cheer you; but in adversity, without his approbation, how heavily will every stroke fall! and how deeply will every wound be felt!

Let me know always that he is near that justifieth me; that all is well with my soul and for eternity; that he will support me under my burden; that, though he afflicts me, he loves me; and afflicts me *because* he loves me. And I will say, "Here I am, let him do what seemeth him good."

DECEMBER 14.—EVENING.

"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."

HEB. v. 9.

We are made perfect as sin is subdued in us, as holiness prevails, as we love the law of God, and find his service our delight. It is thus *we* are transformed by the renewing of the mind; and are changed from glory to glory, as by the spirit of the Lord. But this was not the case with the Lord Jesus. He was the Holy One of God. He had in him nothing to mortify, nothing to eradicate, nothing to convert.

And the term here does not refer to his personal perfection, but to his official. He stood in a peculiar relation to us, as the accomplisher of our recovery from the Fall; and for this a certain kind of process was necessary, by way of qualification; including his incarnation, abasement, and suffering. This is fully expressed in an earlier part of the Epistle, where it is said, he was made "perfect through suffering;" and that it "behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren." The same is more than implied in the words before us: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things he suffered;" and, in this way, "being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." And it is by this poverty we are enriched; it is by his stripes we are healed; it is by his death we live. He was our Redeemer in order to be our righteousness and strength. He procured on the cross all that he applies on the throne.

The "author" of a work is very distinguishable from the means. And this is peculiarly the care in the work before us. The Scriptures, ministers, ordi-

nances, providences, may all aid us in attaining salvation; but he is the Author. There is not salvation in any other. No man cometh unto the Father, but by him.

To be the author of some works is a disgrace; to be the author of others is a very little honour: but there are works which have gained for their performers the admiration and praises of nations, and of ages. To be the author of salvation, is to surpass every other agent, more than the sun differs from a glowworm. All the angels of God, and they are good judges, exclaim, at the sight of it with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." All other deliverers and benefactors are as much below him, in kindness and efficiency, as the body is inferior to the soul, and time to eternity.

He is the author of *eternal* salvation. Eternity would add dignity to a trifle. But what an importance does it attach, what a crowning glory and happiness, when it is added to our wishes and our hopes! What the world promises the votaries of riches, fame, and pleasure, is uncertain, short, vanishing; and they set their heart on that which is not. But you, O Christian, have chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from you. You have a better and an enduring substance. Your salvation shall be for ever. For ever—absolutely. All other salvations are everlasting only by comparison. The various deliverances of the Jews terminated in fresh ruin; and they were again conquered, spoiled, and enslaved. But the believer is passed from death unto life; and shall never come into condemnation.

The crown he obtains is a crown of glory, that cannot fade away. His portion is, without any qualification of the term, perfectly endless—His song will always be new—his blessedness always beginning. For ever—*emphatically*. The present system is too narrow and too short for its development and realization. There must be new heavens and a new earth. There must be an immortality of duration. It is to eternity this salvation principally looks. Eternity is the grand sphere of it. *There* its glories are to be displayed: *there* its treasures are to be possessed: *there* its blessings are to be enjoyed. And so shall we be for ever with the Lord.

But who will be the partakers of this salvation? "All," says the Apostle, "that obey him." Does he mean then to exclude from hope those who have hitherto been disobedient? Who then could be saved? Christians themselves will acknowledge, that they themselves were sometimes foolish and disobedient; and that it was after this the lovingkindness of God their Saviour towards them appeared. And is not the language of the Gospel addressed to such? "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." But the Apostle would intimate, that the salvation is a holy salvation; that though its blessings are derived entirely from grace, they can only be enjoyed in a state of obedience: that though this obedience is not the cause of the salvation, it is the accompaniment, and characterizes all those who are the subjects of it.

Do we then obey him? How *reasonable* is this obedience! But how *necessary* is it!

We cannot be ignorant of his will. We know that he commands us to believe on his Name, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, to follow him, to seek those things which are above. What is our practice, our disposition, our prayer, with regard to all this? *Can we say, sincerely and earnestly—*

“Make me to walk in thy commands,
’Tis a delightful road ;
Nor let my head, nor heart, nor hands,
Offend against my God.”

DECEMBER 15.—MORNING.

“The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them.”

REV. vii. 17.

THE Lamb. This is an appellation given the Lord Jesus, for two reasons—The one alluding to his personal qualities; such as purity, innocency, gentleness, meekness, patience: for he was led as a lamb to the slaughter. The other, in reference to the design of his death. Abel offered to God a firstling of the flock. Familiar with the use of such a victim, Isaac asked, “Where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?” Under the Law, a lamb was offered every morning and every evening; and on the Sabbath-day, two were offered in the morning, and two in the evening. There was also the Paschal lamb, whose blood was sprinkled, and whose flesh was eaten, at the deliverance of the Jews from the destroying angel. And “Christ, our passover,” says Paul, “is sacrificed for us.” And John cried, “Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!” And it is worthy of our observation, that the name is

applied to him, not only in his abasement, but in his exaltation; and that no less than twenty-eight times he is called the Lamb, in this Book of the Revelation!

His glory is much spoken of in the Scripture, but never in stronger language than here: "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne"—a station of dignity, dominion, government, full supremacy. Surely, if the sacred writers intended to intimate that he was a mere creature only, they have expressed themselves in a manner very unguarded and ensnaring. Well; there he is—not only near the throne—but in it—and in the midst of it; in spite of all opposition—Let his enemies tremble; and beware. They may make war with the Lamb; but the Lamb will overcome them: for he is King of kings and Lord of lords. But let his followers boldly profess him. Why should they be ashamed of a Leader that is in the midst of the throne? and why do they not rejoice in his salvation? Surely they must, if they love him; for love always exults in the prosperity of its object. Surely every feeling of their heart must prompt the desire; "and blessed be his glorious Name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory." Well; there he is, in the possession of all power in heaven and in earth: able to save them; to preserve them; to make all things work together for their good.

And as is his greatness, so is his condescension and kindness. The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne "shall feed them." The imagery is pastoral. His people are held forth as sheep; and he performs the office of a shepherd. His concern with them begins here. He seeks after them when lost. He brings them to his fold. He furnishes them with sup-

plies. They can rely on the extensiveness of his care and the continuance of it; and may individually say, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want—

" While he affords his aid,
I cannot yield to fear :

Though I should walk through Death's dark shade,
My Shepherd's with me there."

Nor is this all. When they shall come out of great tribulation; and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb—when they shall be before the throne and serve him day and night in his temple—then—even then, he shall feed them—not, as now, by ministers and ordinances; but immediately—not, as now, in the wilderness; but in the heavenly Canaan—not, as now, surrounded with enemies; but where all shall be quietness and assurance for ever—The Lamb shall feed them. He shall be the dispenser, and the source of their happiness. It will flow from his presence and communications—Therefore, Paul desired to depart, to be with Christ, which was far better—" *He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.* They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: FOR the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!"

This is the representation of heaven, which, poor Burns says, he could never read from a child, without tears. Oh! let me not admire the description only, but seek after the enjoyment of the blessedness. The language is pathetic, and the scenery is inviting; but is the subject itself more interesting than either? I

must be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. I cannot hope to attain hereafter, what I do not desire and delight in now. A natural man may long for a heaven of release from toil and pain—Do I, O my soul, prize a heaven of which Christ is all in all?

DECEMBER 15.—EVENING.

"But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him."

2 KINGS iii. 15.

WE have here a narrative of the expedition of Jehoram king of Israel against Moab. He drew into the enterprise not only the king of Edom, but Jehoshaphat the king of Judah; a good man, but who was here led into temptation, for which he would have perished, if the Lord had dealt with him after his desert. We are not to hate the irreligious, or refuse to do them good as we have opportunity; but with regard to unhallowed intimacy and alliances, we are to remember that evil communications corrupt good manners, and that as for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord will lead them forth with the workers of iniquity. This was not the first time Jehoshaphat had erred in the same thing. He had some years before joined with Ahab the father of Jehoram, and had paid dear for his folly. The proverb says, a burnt child dreads the fire. Even an animal, who has once suffered, will avoid the cause for ever after. But men are not equally wise—"Why will ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more."

To return. "So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah and the king of Edom: and they

fetches a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them. And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab!" But was it the Lord's doing? The distress was from him, but not the cause. Yet so it is; "the foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord." Yet a godly man will differ from others, even in a common mistake or calamity; and "Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him?" He should have consulted before he took the step, both as to the war itself, and the direction they were to take. It was thus David always did, and thus prospered. Yet it was better done late than entirely neglected. We have also here an image of what frequently takes place. God's servants are not thought of in ease, prosperity, and health: but when conscience is alarmed, when trouble comes, when sickness and death threaten—then where is the minister? Send for the minister!

But how came Elisha here? In such a place! In such company! He was not here as the king's chaplain, or the army's chaplain; he was deemed by both the troubler of Israel. It is probable, as God designed to put honour upon him, that he was there by a Divine impulse. However this may be, he *was* there: for "one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, here is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah." Upon this Jehoram is silent. But Jehoshaphat commends him, and says, "The word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom went down to him. And Elisha said unto

the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee ? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay : for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab. And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee."

It seems surprising that Jehoram did not resent this. But now his haughty spirit was bowed down, and his conscience sided with the man of God.

It is a character of a citizen of Zion, how much more of a messenger of Divine truth, that in his eyes a vile person is contemned, while he honours them that fear the Lord. What a difference is there between the righteous and the wicked ! And we should feel it, and shew it in our conduct—But we must shew it properly. And here some distinction is necessary. Elisha does not here speak as a subject : there is a respect due to a sovereign officially, whatever be his character ; and therefore Paul retracted an exceptionable expression, remembering that it was said, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." But it was the prophet who here spoke in the name of the Most High God. Yet something of nature, it would seem, mingled with it ; so that he was irritated and ruffled, and was rendered for the time unsusceptible of the prophetic inspiration. And what does he ? "Bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him."

Minstrels were persons who played on the harp, and also sung, and sometimes with dancing. They

are now unusual ; but they were very common formerly, in most countries. There were many of them in Israel.

The love of music is generally reckoned a sign of a good temper, and the use of it may help a bad one. The indulgence of it may be carried to excess, and be abused ; but, upon the whole, it is one of the most innocent, as well as agreeable employments. It has often been called in to inflame unhallowed mirth ; but the Moravians, and Luther, and Calvin, and a thousand more, have proved that it is not only consistent with devotion, but aidful of it. It is founded in human nature. God has constructed us alive to it. Pythagoras used it always before he retired to bed. Pluto recommends the use of it in the laws of his republic. David, by his harp, often chased away the evil spirit from Saul. It was much practised by the students in the schools of the prophets : hence Samuel said to Saul, at a certain place " thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp before them ; and they shall prophesy : and the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man." And here we find Elisha called in a devout Levite, to play and sing before him, to calm and raise his spirits, to receive the message of the Almighty.

Who thinks sufficiently of the dependence of spirit on matter ? Does not every thing religious first address itself to the senses ?

But let us derive an example from Elisha. Let us serve God without distraction. Let us lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting. Let us cherish

in religious exercises serenity, and love, and gentleness of mind, and feeling—

“ The Spirit, like a peaceful dove,
Flies from the realms of noise and strife ;
Why should we vex and grieve his love,
Who seals our souls to heavenly life ?”

DECEMBER 16.—MORNING.

“ And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.” 1 SAM. xxiii. 16.

WE here see, in the experience of David, that the most eminent of God's people may need encouragement. He was now dejected and dismayed. And we learn from his complaints, in the Book of Psalms, that he was frequently the subject of depression. And to which of the saints recorded in the Scripture can we turn, whose hands never hung down, whose knees never trembled? *These*, we are prone to consider as peculiar in their religious attainments; but *they* also were only enlightened and sanctified in part. They also had in them nature, as well as grace. They too were men of like passions with us, and compassed with infirmities. All those perfect beings now before the throne, were previously in a vale of tears; the spirit indeed willing, but the flesh weak: sometimes rejoicing in God their Saviour; but sometimes saying, “I am cast out of his sight.”

In the conduct of Jonathan, we see the duty of real friendship. A friend is born for adversity; and

"to him that is afflicted, pity should be shewn from his friend." This, however, is not always the case. Many pretenders fail when the day of trial comes; and he who relied upon their attendance, and sympathy, and succour, in trouble, finds his confidence, as Solomon expresses it, "like a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint." Yet let us not say, in our haste, All men are liars. See Jonathan, a young prince—surrounded with every indulgence—undertaking, without application, to repair to David—to see and serve his friend at the hazard of his life.

In the relief derived from this visit we learn the advantage of pious intercourse. "Come," said Jonathan, "Come, David, remember God's promise. Is it not faithful and true? Think of the anointing oil Samuel poured upon thy head—Can this be in vain? Who enabled thee to conquer Goliath? Who delivered thee from the paw of the lion and the bear? He can turn the shadow of death into the morning. He saveth by his right hand them that put their trust in him, from them that rise up against them. He keeps them as the apple of the eye—Encourage thyself in the Lord thy God."

—The address availed—"He strengthened his hand in God." We have a similar instance in the experience of Paul. He had appealed unto Cæsar, and was now approaching the scene of his trial; and his heart was cast down within him: but the brethren from Rome came down as far as Appii-Forum to meet him: "whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage." "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to

him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to lift him up." Who, when dull, has not found a Christian visiter a quickening spirit? "As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend." Who, in sadness and gloom, has not found refreshment and delight from godly communion? Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth a man his friend by hearty counsel. Who, like Hagar, has not sometimes been ready to expire with thirst, till some minister has opened his eyes, and shewn him a well?

And who does not perceive, in the strange circumstances of this consolation, that God can never be at a loss to comfort his followers? He knows, not only how to deliver the godly out of temptation, but to cheer them in it. He is called the God of all comfort. David was now in a state of concealment. Of the few that were with him, no one perhaps knew the state of his mind; for good men, from their regard for the honour of religion, are not always at liberty to lay open many of their distressful feelings. But his God knew what he now suffered; and what his frame of mind required—And what was the instrument he employed? Jonathan: "Saul's son," as it is added—and wisely added. The son of David's bitterest foe. The son, too, that was interested in David's destruction. He was the heir apparent; and he comforts the man who was going to fill a throne, which, by the law of succession, belonged to himself! How wonderful was this! How obviously the work of God! All hearts are in his hand, and he can turn them as he pleases. It is he that gives us favour in the eyes of others; and he can raise us up helpers and friends, as unlikely to aid us,

as the ravens were to feed Elijah.—Many a situation also, the most improbable, has been made, by his communications, none other but the house of God and the gate of heaven; and, filled with surprise, we have exclaimed, with Jacob, "Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not!" When are we inaccessible to him? "From the end of the earth," said David, "will I cry unto thee when my heart is overwhelmed." And no wonder; he remembered that Jonathan, Saul's son, arose, and came to him *into the wood*, and strengthened his hand in God. Did he never come to you on a similar condition? "They shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence; and the valley of Achor for a door of hope."

DECEMBER 16.—EVENING.

"Ah, Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and **THERE IS NOTHING TOO HARD FOR THEE.**"

JER. xxxii. 17.

MUCH of true godliness consists in our holding communion with God not only in his relations, but in what we call his attributes or the perfections of his nature. We should especially do this, as our circumstances and experience render the exertion of any one of them in particular peculiarly needful and reasonable. This might be exemplified with regard to our misery and his mercy, our guilt and his grace, our ignorance and his wisdom. But what is the practical use we should make of the truth before us

—a truth which all will readily acknowledge in speculation—"Nothing is too hard for Thee"?

Why, then, surely, we should flee from his wrath, and seek an interest in his favour. Who would not dread the displeasure of Omnipotence? Who knoweth the power of *his* anger? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God. His wrath is almighty. It can arm every creature against me, from an insect to an archangel. It can operate immediately upon my mind without the intervention of instruments. It can reach me where no mortal foe can touch me, beyond death and the grave. Hence said the Saviour, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him." But if he can be an almighty enemy, he can be an omnipotent friend. He can cause all creatures to be at peace with me; and make all things to work together for my good. If he loves me and provides for me, the providence, the love is attended with infinite means and resources: and eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

"And can this mighty Lord
Of glory condescend?
And will he write his name
My Father and my Friend?"

He has rendered it more than possible. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" He waits to be gracious, and is exalted to

have mercy upon us. He has established a ministry of reconciliation. By his servants God himself beseeches you to be reconciled unto God !

If nothing is too hard for him, let me depend upon him for the renovation of my depraved nature. Indeed, when I consider myself, and think of the work that is to be accomplished,—that it is not a mere change of opinion, a reformation of manners, but a transformation by the renewing of the mind, I should see no medium between utter despondency and that hope which leads me to this Rock which is higher than I. He is the God of all grace. He can enlighten this understanding, dark as it is. He can soften this heart, hard as it is. He can render my duty my privilege ; my work my pleasure. He can put his Spirit within me, and cause me to walk in his statutes and judgments to do them. He can give me a sense of his pardoning love under the deepest sense of my unworthiness and desert, and purge my conscience from dead works to serve the living God. He is also adequate to the continuance and carrying on of the good work after he has begun it. Through all my dangers he can preserve me to the end of my course, and make me more than a conqueror. Under every burden he can sustain me. In every duty his grace is sufficient for me.—Nothing is too hard for him.

This should animate us to do good in hopeless cases. I call these cases hopeless in reference to ordinary means and mere human agency ; but there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. He has a mighty arm ; strong is his hand, and high is his right hand. Who brought Manasseh to himself after he had sinned away all the effects of a pious education,

and had sunk to the lowest depths of vice? By whom were the Corinthian converts washed, justified, sanctified? Let ministers who look down upon hearers who have grown into impenitence under their labors; let fathers and mothers whose hearts are bleeding over children of disobedience; let all who are striving in their stations to save a soul from death, encourage themselves in the Lord their God, and remember that he is able even of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Let the reflection also sustain and comfort us when useful and valuable instruments are called away. There is much idolatry in our hearts, of which we are not aware till the idols are laid hold of and removed; then we groan and exclaim, "My wound is incurable:" "Mine eyes shall no more see good." Yet, when the stream is dried up, is the fountain exhausted? When the husband and the father are withdrawn, does not He still live who is the Father of the fatherless and the Husband of the widow? Many a dying saint, in the midst of weeping dependents, has felt, as a cordial to his heart, the Divine assurance, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me." We may apply this still more to the cause of God. Here he uses means; and we ought to esteem them: but we must not depend upon them, or suppose that any of them are *essential* to his work. The government of the Church is not suspended upon men, however wise and qualified, but upon the shoulder of Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. With him is the residue of the Spirit. When Elijah was taken, Elisha was left, and endued with a double portion of his spirit. What should we have said had we

lived when Paul, when Luther died? Had we seen the prisons filled and the stake fed with pious victims, what would have been our fears for the Reformation? But these prisons, these fires, only extolled, and increased, and recommended it. The professors, the preachers, suffered as evil-doers, even unto bonds; but the word of God was not bound. Yea, the things that happened unto them turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel.

Finally, if nothing is too hard for the Lord, let it establish our confidence in his word of prophecy and promise, whatever seems to oppose the accomplishment of it. We can not absolutely depend upon the word of men, for they are changeable; and, if they continue in the same mind, they may be unable to fulfil their engagements. But with God there is no variableness nor shadow of turning, neither can he be ever incapacitated to perform with his hand what he has spoken with his mouth. The largeness of God's promise in the wilderness was at first too much for the faith of even Moses himself. "And Moses said, The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?" But what said the answer of God? "Is the Lord's hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not." It was otherwise with Abraham, the father of the faithful. When God had made promise to Abraham, notwithstanding the improbability, and, naturally considered,

impossibility of the fulfilment, "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief: but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform." So let it be with us, first as to all God has engaged to do for us personally—even to the resurrection of our bodies, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself: and, secondly, as to all those declarations of a public nature, and which regard the conversion of the Jews, and the call of the Gentiles, and the filling of the earth with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. These are not visionary representations—"The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it"—and "in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength"—"NOTHING IS TOO HARD FOR THE LORD."

DECEMBER 17.—MORNING.

"And a certain Scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

MATT. viii. 19, 20.

THE god of this world deludes his followers. He conceals from them every difficulty and danger to which they are exposed in his service; and raises in them expectations which he knows will never be fulfilled. Like Jael, he welcomes in, and spreads the couch, and brings forth butter in a lordly dish—but keeps out of sight the hammer and the nails. Take a man whose object is to gain a name, to become a

leader, and to draw away disciples after him: he courts popularity; he flatters; he employs any means; and he accommodates himself to every disposition, as far as he can, without risking discovery. But it was far otherwise with the founder of Christianity. His character was as original as it was excellent. His kingdom was not of this world. His professed object was, to instruct, and save, and bless; and no selfish aim was hidden under it. He shewed, in his own person, how little his followers were to mind earthly things; and, in dealing with those who came to him, we see that it was not his concern to draw unprincipled crowds into his train. He would form a peculiar people, who should be actuated by the noblest convictions and purposes. He therefore, in order to discriminate, applied a test. He warned them to sit down first, and count the cost; and assured them at once, that if any man would be his disciple, he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and forsake all that he had.

—Our Lord now “saw great multitudes about him;” so that “he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.” But as, in the midst of all these, he was stepping towards the ship, “a certain Scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.” A noble resolution, if it had been from a good motive. But he apprehended our Saviour to be a temporal Messiah, who, as he appeared able, from his miracles, to carry every thing before him, would soon have promotions at his disposal; and he hoped to gain some of the loaves and fishes. Our Lord well knew his thoughts; and said unto him, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not

where to lay his head—What say you now?" It is easy to determine what would have been his reply if he had been sincere and earnest in his application. "O Lord, I come, not to prescribe, but to resign myself entirely to thee. Every thing appears to me less than nothing and vanity, compared with the salvation of my soul; and if, by any means, I can attain it, I shall be satisfied. Whatever, dear and useful as I have deemed it, I cannot retain in following thee, I cheerfully give up. All I fear is, separation from thyself—Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee—Lord, I will follow thee to prison and to death." But, alas! his mean and mercenary temper was now detected. We hear no more of him; he left him, having loved this present world.

But the narrative is recorded for our admonition; and the fact, which by way of trial our Saviour addressed to this pretender, is worthy of our attention. It is very affecting and instructive—It is the indigence of Jesus appearing in the homelessness of his condition. This, as a part, is put for the whole of his abasement; and it is held forth enhanced by contrast. The inferior creatures have dwellings convenient for them, in which they secure themselves, and enjoy repose, and breed up their young. of these, man takes as inmates under his own roof; such are the faithful dog, and the feathered creature in the cage. He furnishes also shelter as well as provender for his cattle. But animals that live at large have also accommodations suited to their kinds. "Foxes have holes." "The young lions gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens." "The high hills are a refuge for the goats, and the

rocks for the conies." "The spider taketh hold with her hand, and is in king's palaces." "The birds of the air have nests." The eagle mounts up, and, in rocks inaccessible, "maketh her nest on high." "As for the stork, the fir trees are her house." Some build on the ground; some in dense thickets; some in boughs, depending over the flood; some in isles secured by water. Some repair to the habitations of men: there the sparrow finds a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young. And who in all this, can help admiring the wisdom and kindness of Providence? His tender mercies are over all his works. As he made all, so he careth for them. He giveth them their meat in due season. He furnishes them with their powers of defence, or flight; and actuates the skill they display in all their surprising economies. And will he disregard his rational offspring? He teacheth *them* more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh them wiser than the fowls of the air. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. How superior is reason to instinct! How boundless in improvement is human ingenuity! What abodes has it provided for us! And with what conveniences, comforts, pleasures, has it replenished them! From hence springs the idea of *home*. We cleave to a place where we received our birth, passed the days of infancy, indulged in the sports of youth; where sleep has refreshed our wearied bodies; and where we have smiled at the descending storm, and the piercing cold.

" Home is
The loved retreat of peace and plenty; where,
Supporting and supported, polish'd friends
And dear relations meet, and mingle into bliss."

Well may the same poet represent the man returning at eve, buried in the drifted snow, as "stung with the thoughts of home."

A homeless condition, therefore, is the most pitiable. And was this the condition of the Lord Jesus? Not absolutely. During his private life he lived with Joseph and Mary, at Nazareth. And after he entered on his public ministry, he had friends, who, like Martha, gladly afforded him the accommodations of their own dwellings. But these advantages were occasional; and were of the nature of hospitality. He never possessed a habitation or an apartment he could call his own. He was born in another man's house; and this was a stable; and he was laid in a manger. How often, when my children were about me, have I said, while viewing my sleeping babe—

"How much better thou art attended
Than the Son of God could be,
When from heaven he descended,
And became a child like thee!

"Soft and easy is thy cradle—
Coarse and hard the Saviour lay,
When his birthplace was a stable,
And his softest bed was hay!"

How soon was he driven an infant exile into Egypt! Widows ministered unto him of their substance. Wearied with his journey, he sat on the well, and said to the woman, Give me drink. A fish furnished him with money to pay the temple tribute. One night he slept in a fishing-boat. Another he continued all night in prayer in a mountain. We read only once of his riding, though he went about doing good; and this was upon a borrowed ass, and a colt

the foal of an ass. He partook of the last passover in a borrowed chamber: he was wrapped in linen not his own, when taken down from the cross; and was buried in another man's garden, and another man's tomb! What does all this teach us?

DECEMBER 17.—EVENING.

"And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

MATT. viii. 20.

THE fact is affecting; but is it not instructive too?

We may take from it a standard by which to judge of the age and country in which he appeared. Nothing reflects more upon a people, than suffering characters, distinguished by the greatest goodness and usefulness, to want. It will always be a reproach to the Corinthian converts that they allowed such a man as Paul, while preaching and working miracles among them, to work night and day at tent-making. But we love and commend the Philippians, who once and again, when he was in Thessalonica, sent to his necessity.—Surely, we should have said, men will reverence God's Son. At his coming, nobles and princes will offer their mansions and places. What preparations are made to receive a superior! Yet the honour of the visit is deemed a recompense for the trouble and expense. But *he* was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came to his own, and his own received him not. What is man? Let Judæa furnish an answer. See the Lord of all; the friend of misery; possessed of every moral perfection; the image of the invisible God; yet not having "where to lay his head"!!

But is human nature the same now? Some censure others, and think well of themselves merely because they have not been tried by the same circumstances. "Oh! had we been living there, he should not have been destitute of any accommodation we could have yielded him." Yet you follow the multitude; and the reproach of a name will keep you from owning his truth; and you are backward in giving in the support of his cause. But, by the disposition which you exercise towards his Gospel, and house, and ministers, and members, he judges of your attachment or indifference to himself—He that receiveth you, receiveth me—Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to me—Depart.

Pause, and admire the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. Do not imagine that he did not *feel* his condition. He was really a partaker of flesh and blood; and knew the sensations of hunger, and weariness, and cold as well as any other man. But the conveniences and comforts which he required he often found not. Think of his preaching and travelling all the livelong day; and at night not having where to lay his head! The sensibility of his condition was enhanced by his former state of dignity and enjoyment. We are therefore more affected when we see a prince reduced, than when we behold an individual suffering who was always indigent. Jesus was higher than the kings of the earth, and had given them all their thrones. Heaven had been his dwelling-place; and all the angels his attendants, and adorers too. What condescension was here! Let

us remember that he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant. There was no compulsion: it was all voluntary: not for himself, but for us. And did we deserve such an interposition? such an expensiveness of sacrifice for our comfort? We were viler than the earth; we were enemies by wicked works. Yet he never repented of his engagement; but said, as he was entering all this abasement, Lo! I come! I delight to do thy will! And as his agony approached, he said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" It was therefore, as the Apostle calls it, Grace; grace the most free and unparalleled. And shall not this love, which passeth knowledge, fix our minds, and fill our hearts? Where is our gratitude, unless we are willing to deny ourselves for him, and to walk worthy of such a divine benefactor unto all well-pleasing? The lower he descended to save me, the higher shall he rise in my esteem for ever. He is always, and altogether lovely: but never so adorable as when his face is marred more than any man's; and he has not where to lay his head.

Let us also learn not to judge of worth by external advantages. True greatness is personal; and does not depend on power, titles, or wealth. Is a man the more valued of God because he has a larger field or a longer purse than his neighbour? Does it give him more virtue or understanding? A fool, a child of the devil, may be set on the high places of the earth: while the Apostles were hungry and naked; and the Son of God had not where to lay his head. While we view him who is higher than the heavens in such an estate, let us learn the vanity of worldly distinc-

tions. Let us see how absurd it is to be vain of a fine house, and splendid furniture, or any of the meanness of the pride of life. Let us despise ourselves, if we have esteemed a man the more for the gold ring and gay clothing; or regarded the poor the less because he is poor; and remember, that if we had lived in Judæa, we should have courted Pontius Pilate and shunned Jesus Christ.

Let the Lord's poor take this truth, and apply it, to produce resignation under the privations of life. You talk of penury; but he *was* poor. You have many a comfort you can call your own; but he had not a place where to lay his head. But allowing that your trials were much greater than they are: remember, this is not your rest, and you are rich in faith, and have the honour of conformity to the Lord Jesus. You only know the fellowship of his sufferings. Is it not enough that the servant be as his Master, and the disciple as his Lord? Can the common soldier complain when he sees the commander-in-chief sharing the same hardships with himself?

Let it lead us to rejoice in the Saviour's present condition. He that descended is the same also that ascended. He who was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory and honour. He who had not where to lay his head has all power in heaven and in earth. How delightful is this assurance to those who love him! for love glories in the exaltation of its object. It is also interesting to their hopes. They are one with him. And because he lives, they shall live also.

DECEMBER 18.—MORNING.

"And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their laying in wait was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket."

ACTS ix. 23—25.

THOUGH this is related immediately after Paul's conversion, it did not happen till a very considerable time afterwards. The aim of Luke, the sacred historian, was not to give a full and continued series of events, but to record particular facts and circumstances as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. He therefore often passes over large intervals between without notice.

It was near Damascus the Saviour met with Saul, and into which he had been led after he arose from the earth: "And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth." Here by Ananias he was restored to sight; and here he received meat, and was strengthened. "Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this Name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But

Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." Yet we know from Paul's own declaration, in his epistle to the Galatians, that instantly upon this he did not go up to Jerusalem, but went into Arabia, where, during three years, he was taught, not of man, nor by man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is probable that, during this period, he more than once visited Damascus. However this may be, here we find him at the end of it; and encompassed with danger, for he was in deaths oft, and could truly say, I die daily. His peril arose from "the Jews, who took counsel to kill him." Instead of being convinced by such a supernatural and notorious event, and which would be attested by so many witnesses, they were only enraged the more: for they viewed him as an apostate from them; and they knew, from his talents and zeal, how likely he was to promote the cause of Jesus of Nazareth.

Yet such things as they were now doing against him he had himself formerly done to others. How often would he be reminded of his sin in his sufferings! This would tend to keep him humble and patient. "Ah! so I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it."

So malignant and determined were they, that "they watched the gates day and night to kill him." At first this looks not like an exertion of authority, but an assassination affair, in which a number of wretches waylaid him of their own accord. Yet the governor was apprised of their design, and was drawn over to their interest, and more than allowed them to keep the egresses: for the city was large, and the avenues many, requiring no few to keep them. The

Apostle, in relating the transaction himself, says, "The *governor*, under Aretas the king, kept the city of the Damascenes with a *garrison desirous to apprehend me*."

We have seen his danger: let us observe his deliverance. He seemed a certain prey: but "their laying in wait was known of Saul; and the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket." Here we remark two things. First, the escape was not miraculous. In this way the Lord has often delivered his servants; and in this way he is continually *able* to deliver them. But he never needlessly multiplied miracles. We cannot see how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could have been saved out of the midst of the fiery furnace, or Daniel from the lions' den, without a miracle. A miracle also was called for to release Peter from prison, secured as he was, the night before his intended execution. But here the deliverance could be effected by human means; they were therefore properly employed, and Providence only rendered them successful. Secondly; we are not to sacrifice our lives if we can preserve them consistently with a good conscience. Our Lord told his disciples to beware of men; to be wise as serpents, as well as harmless as doves; and if they were persecuted in one city, to flee to another. He himself eluded apprehension till he knew his hour was come. In the first age of Christianity we see zeal, but not without knowledge. There was nothing like enthusiasm, fanaticism, or will-worship. It was enough for Christians to take up their cross when they found it in their way; they never went *out* of their way to *find* it, any more than to *escape* it. They only suffered according to the will of God. It

was after the Gospel began to be misunderstood and debased that voluntary penalties were deemed meritorious; that a *rage* for martyrdom prevailed; and that men *gave* their bodies to be burnt.

DECEMBER 18.—EVENING.

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem."

ACTS ix. 26—28.

WE have just seen Paul at Damascus. We now see him entering Jerusalem. And observe to whom he wished to introduce himself when he arrived. Not to the high priest: he had done business enough with him before. Not to the Pharisees, though he had lived among the strictest of them. Not to the learned, though a man of letters himself, and though he had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, who probably was still living in the city—But he "assayed to join himself to the disciples." They were despised and persecuted. He had himself once hated them, and endeavoured to exterminate them from the earth. But now the world is not worthy of them. He ranks them above princes and philosophers; in them is all his delight; and he deems it his highest honour to have fellowship with them. Have we the same mind in us? In the course of duty, unless we go out of the world, we must often mingle with others; but are these, in our voluntary associations, our companions? Do we take

hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you? Do we give ourselves, not only to the Lord, but to them, to walk in holy communion, and to co-operate in holy exertion? When we pass through a place as we travel, do we feel a sentiment that leads us to think, with a peculiar concern, "Are there any here who love and serve my Lord and Saviour?"

"But the disciples were all afraid of him:" and the reason is assigned: "they believed not that he was a disciple." They supposed that he only pretended to be so, but was really come among them as a spy or informer. They well knew what a bitter adversary he had been, and had not heard of him since the wolf had been turned into a lamb. If there seems something strange in this, let it be observed, that Damascus was more than a hundred miles from Jerusalem; and that the modes of modern communication were not then known; and that the war raging between Herod Antipas and Aretas must have interrupted the intercourse between the two capitals. Neither is it unlikely that the unbelieving Jews maliciously and artfully represented him as acting the part of a deceiver.

However this was, they seem to have known nothing of his conversion till "Barnabas took him and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." How Barnabas was acquainted with all this, while they were ignorant, we are not informed. Had he seen Ananias, or some other credible and personal witness of these facts? One man, from various supposable circum-

stances, may know things of which others, even of the same place, are uninformed. But from this time a most tender friendship was established between these two good men. And what Barnabas testified of Paul was so satisfactory to the Church, that he was fully admitted to their fellowship; "and was with them coming in and going out of Jerusalem."

We may here see,—First, That these disciples were careful whom they admitted among them. They were only such as they *believed to be disciples*. They did not desire, for the sake of largeness, a church filled with indiscriminate members; and they could not bear them that were evil. Secondly, it is possible to err on the side of caution. We may be too strict, as well as too lax. It is easy to carry our suspicions too far, especially with regard to those against whom we have entertained any prejudice, or from whom we have received any injury or offence. The instances of deception we have met with may weaken our confidence, and cause the innocent to suffer for the guilty. Let us guard against this; and while we do not shut our eyes, let us invite into our bosoms the charity that thinketh no evil. Thirdly, we may depend on testimony concerning character in the absence of personal knowledge. This indeed is not always infallible; but there are cases in which it ought to be admitted, and should be deemed sufficient not only for individuals, but churches, to act upon, in receiving others to their countenance, and their communion. Fourthly, the introducing of a young convert to the fellowship of the saints is a good work, and should be encouraged. Some are backward, not from a want of inclination, for they often sigh, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob! and thy

tabernacles, O Israel!" but they want confidence and help. How many are there in all our congregations of this character, who are kept back when they ought to come forward! Is there no Barnabas to take them by the hand, and to bring them forward—while the Church rises up and says, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord"?

DECEMBER 19.—MORNING.

"I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her." Ps. lxxxvii. 4, 5.

THE Jews, partly from their ignorance, and partly from their aversion to Christianity, strangely pervert this passage. They contend that it is designed to intimate that while other places would produce only now and then a man of note, Jerusalem should abound with all kinds of illustrious characters. But the meaning is this. Zion, in whose name the writer speaks, is foretelling the vocation of the Gentiles; and viewing with ecstasy the accessions that should be made to her of such as should be saved.

Observe to whom she addresses the intelligence—"I will make mention to *them that know me*." That is, to her friends and acquaintances. To such it is natural for us to divulge anything that is interesting and delightful; as *they* are likely to receive it without envy, and to partake of the pleasure. In the parable, the shepherd having succeeded in his search, not only rejoices himself, but, when he cometh home, calls together his neighbours and friends, saying unto

them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. The Church well knew the mind of the godly, that they would not only understand such news, but that it would be to them like cold water to a thirsty soul, or as life from the dead. Thus, in the Acts, when the brethren were informed of the extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles—"they glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

Observe the places from which these additions should come. "I will make mention to them that know me of *Rahab* and *Babylon*: behold *Philistia*, and *Tyre*, with *Ethiopia*." These are parts put for the whole of the Gentile world; and they are very strikingly put. For all these had been strangers or enemies. Some of them had been her bitterest persecutors, and vilest oppressors. They were all at this time lying in wickedness, enveloped in ignorance, and enslaved to idolatry. But they should cast away their idols; and, beholding the glory of the Church, abandon their enmity, and take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you. One should say, I am the Lord's; and another should call himself by the name of Jacob; and another should subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.

Mark the change they should experience. "This man was *born there*. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was *born there*." They were born, naturally, in Egypt, Philistia, Tyre, and Babylon: but they were to be born, morally, in Zion; by the Word and Spirit of God. They should become new creatures—They should undergo such a conver-

sion in their minds, and hearts, and lives, as should constitute a new birth. For every subject of divine grace is "born again." And this is properly the date of our existence. We have not lived a moment longer than we have lived "the life of God." "*Ye must be born again.*"

By this, therefore, we are to judge whether we are children of Zion, and may rejoice in her King. If we have experienced this change, we are written among the living in Jerusalem. We are enrolled; and though once aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, we shall be regarded as citizens, and have all the honour and advantages of natives: "*The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there.*"

It was formerly deemed a most enviable privilege to be free of some royal and distinguished city. But what was a citizen of Babylon, or of Rome, compared with a denizen of Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem! Yea, were you an apostle, considered only officially could you prophesy, and work miracles, and raise the dead; and the Saviour met you, elated with your endowments; he would say—"In this rejoice not, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

DECEMBER 19.—EVENING.

"But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?"

2 COR. vi. 18.

In looking ever the annals of the Jews, we find much that ought to humble us—I say, to humble *us*; for they were fair specimens of our human nature: and

"There in a glass our hearts may see
How fickle and how false *they* be."

But we sometimes meet with scenes which cannot fail of being delightful to pious minds: for while, in reviewing history, the merchant is led to notice the revivals of commerce, and the scholar those of learning and science, *they* are attracted to the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. They, like Barnabas, are glad when they see the grace of God.

Such a scene is here before us at the dedication of the temple. Perhaps nothing equals it in the Old Testament; and nothing surpasses it in the New, but the day of Pentecost. The author was doubtless the Holy Ghost, the source of all good in the children of men: and it would be well for hearers and ministers to remember the Divine decision, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." Yet God uses means; and, could we see things as he does, we should always perceive, not only that the weakness of the means requires his strength, but that the suitableness of the means displays his wisdom. The instrument here employed was Solomon; whose rank, education, endowments, and zeal gave him a peculiar influence.

Behold then all Israel assembled; and the young monarch, the wonder and admiration of the age and of the East, leading the devotion of the solemn day. For he did not appoint one of the priests, or of the prophets, to officiate; but he performed the service himself. "He stood before the altar of the Lord, in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands." It was well that he *could* thus pray himself. We are far from depreciating forms of prayer in all cases: they have their use, and even their excellency too. But it is impossible to

frame a form of prayer to meet every new and pressing occurrence: yet it is very desirable to take advantage of the present feelings; and some are happy enough to be equal to this. And should not good men, especially preachers, and also the heads of families, cultivate such a talent? Gifts are not grace: yet we are to consider others, as well as ourselves; our usefulness, as well as our salvation. Though there is a *more* excellent way, we are to "covet earnestly the best gifts." "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." It is well also that he was not only able, but *willing*. He was not ashamed publicly to avow his entire dependence upon God, and to seek his favour as the relish of every enjoyment, and his blessing as essential to every enterprise. He did not view it as a disparagement to his majesty to be his own chaplain, and to bless his large family himself. And did he ever appear greater than on this occasion, and in this exercise? And could he have been more exemplary and useful?

An ordinary mind would have been struck with the vastness of the congregation, the magnitude of the building, and the munificence of the ornaments—But Solomon rose above all this, and was only astonished at the condescension of God in deigning to regard it: "But will God in every deed dwell with men on the earth!"

His exclamation did not originate in any doubtfulness of the fact. He could not have questioned it. The tokens of the Divine presence were before him—"So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had

filled the house of God. Then said Solomon, the Lord hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness." Yes, he knew that he had said, "This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it;" and, "In all places where I record my Name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." The assurance therefore reaches to us. We have succeeded to their means and privileges, enlarged as to spirituality and efficiency, though unaccompanied with their splendid ceremonies and sensible manifestations. In his word and ordinances, in the preaching of his ministers, and the assemblies of his people, he is to be found; and thousands know the truth of this from their own experience: they have heard his voice; they have seen his glory; they have felt his power, and have been convinced of his presence by his agency: for that his Name is near, his wondrous works declare.

But the exclamation regards the marvellousness of the fact upon which it was founded. Several things excited this in Solomon; and the same should excite it in us. Such is the infinite dignity of the Supreme Being, who is exalted above all blessing and praise, and who humbleth himself to behold the things that are done in heaven. Yet men are lower than the angels. They are of yesterday, and know nothing. Their foundation is in the dust. They are crushed before the moth. Surely *every* man at his *best* estate is *altogether* vanity. He is not only mean, but unworthy, guilty, polluted: a rebel, a traitor. Here is the wonder, that *such* beings should be regarded by him—"Lord, what is *man*, that thou art mindful of him, and the *son* of man, that thou visitest him?"

Yet the truth of all this never impresses without

the humility which religion inspires. Men are naturally proud and vain; and it is possible and easy to delude them into an opinion that they can have claims upon God himself. How many are there who think they deserve his favour, and are looking for heaven itself as the reward of their doings! But in the day of conviction the proud looks are brought low; and the Lord alone is exalted. The man that sees and feels that he deserves to be excluded from the Divine presence for ever, acknowledges every attention shewn him to be an instance of mercy and grace. Nor is his admiration of the goodness of God confined to the beginning of his religious course. As he advances, he is more and more affected with it. The most eminent saints have been always, as the most humble, so the most filled with this adoring gratitude and praise.

But is there not another thing equally wonderful? God in very deed dwells with men on the earth. But will men in very deed dwell with God in heaven? It is his own promise. It is their highest expectation. They shall be presented faultless before the presence of his glory—AND SO SHALL WE BE FOR EVER WITH THE LORD.

DECEMBER 20. MORNING.

“What think ye, that he will not come to the feast?”

JOHN xi. 56.

THIS was the language of many of the Jews, who had ascended from the country to Jerusalem, to purify themselves against the Passover. It is not easy, or perhaps possible, to determine the principle

from which the words were uttered. Perhaps malice uttered them; and they came from persons who wished to discover and apprehend him: for "both the Chief Priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he were, he should shew it, that they might take him." Perhaps curiosity uttered them; and they came from persons who were anxious to see whether he had courage enough to appear in public after the threatening of the rulers. Besides this, he was a very extraordinary character, the fame of whose miracles and preaching had spread far and wide; and they naturally desired to see a personage of whom they had heard so much. Perhaps affection uttered them. For though he was generally despised and rejected of men, there were some who knew his value, and believed him to be the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. They therefore longed for the pleasure, and honour, and advantage of an interview with him at the approaching solemnity. And this is the principle from which, if partakers of divine grace, we are seeking for Jesus. "For Christ our passover," says the Apostle, "is sacrificed for us—Let us therefore keep the feast." And it is in reference to the communion of his body and blood, to which we are going to repair, that we issue the inquiry—"What think ye—that he will not come to the feast?"

This is above every thing desirable. Ordinances are not beneficial, necessarily and of themselves. They derive all their excellency and influence from him. A truth we learn, not only from Scripture, but experience. What a difference, as to light, and life, and joy, do we feel in the same ordinance when he is absent or present! This is nothing to a formalist.

He is satisfied with the outward signs, and the service itself. But, as to the Christian, intercourse with Christ is the one thing needful. He feels it pleasing to hold communion with the saints: but what he principally wants is fellowship with the Saviour—He alone can fill them all; and without him they would have nothing for each other, or for themselves.

But the inquiry implies doubt. Doubt has two aspects and bearings—the unlikely, and the probable—the one exciting fear, and the other encouraging hope. Let us look at each.

—What is there then to awaken our suspicion and fear that he will *not* be at the feast? And is there not much every way? Without going back to our unconverted days, how have we lived since we have made a profession of his Name? Have we walked as those who are not of the world? Have we borne his corrections without murmuring? Have we been grateful under his mercies? Has he lived in our warmest thoughts? Has he been the chief theme of our conversation? Have we not frequently been ashamed of his cause? Have we recommended him earnestly to others? After all this, how can we expect that he will honour us with his company? Should *we* thus honor any fellow-creature who had treated us as we have treated him? But the cause of alarm is increased when we consider not only our conduct at large, but our behaviour towards him with regard to this very feast itself. Have we not suffered trifling excuses to keep us away, when he has been there waiting for us; but waiting in vain? Have we not approached it with the indifference of custom and formality; though angels were there, intensely desiring to look into these things? Have we

not passed through the divine memorials, mystically eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of God, with the exercise of no more faith in his death, or love to our brethren, than in an ordinary meal?—We need not go on. O blessed Jesus! when we consider all this—and this *only*—we may well question whether thou wilt—ever meet with us again.

—But let us look at the other side. Let us see, not only what there is to excite fear, but to encourage hope. Now to induce us to conclude that he will be at the feast—We have his character, his disposition. “His heart is made of tenderness; his bowels melt with love.” “A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.” We have his past dealings with us—He has tried us, but not forsaken us. We have been often cast down, but never cast off. We have his promise—“Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.” In a word, we are sure of the blessing—if we seek it: “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

But is it possible to ascertain when he is with us at the feast? It is. As he is not there corporeally, we cannot apprehend him with our bodily senses: but, as he is there spiritually, we may apprehend him spiritually. They who are new creatures have new senses, which are exercised to discern both good and evil. They have ears to hear his voice. They have eyes to see his glory. They have a holy taste, and holy feelings. Thus his people can be sensible of his arrival. Indeed, he *says*, “I am come.” He is not inactive when there. “While the King sitteth at his table, my

spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof." There are impressions and effects which cannot be mistaken, owing to their holy, humbling, heavenly influence. The assurance he has of communion with the Lord in his ordinances is not evidence for others; but to the believer himself it affords satisfaction: and he is neither to be ridiculed nor reasoned out of the conviction—He has the witness in himself.

DECEMBER 20.—EVENING.

"Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."

1 KINGS xx. 11.

THIS was the wisest thing Ahab ever spoke. Yet the saying was not his own, but a common proverbial speech. The admonition it contains is applicable to any enterprise in which men engage. Accordingly we shall leave the war of Benhadad with this king of Israel, and think of a better warfare, the good fight of faith.

Under this image the Scriptures frequently hold forth the Christian life; and the experience of every partaker of Divine grace verifies and exemplifies the force of it. The conflict is no ordinary one, but the most trying in its nature, and the most serious in its results.

For this war harness is provided; for it would be madness to go into the combat unarmed. Words in time vary their meaning; some becoming more, and some less particular and definite in their use. When the Bible was translated, the term harness, which we now apply only to horse equipage, signified war furniture, or what we call armour. Much depends in

the contest before us upon the kind of armour with which we are accoutred. That of the Christian is Divine: Divine in the appointment; Divine in the formation. It supplies every part—unless the back. Hence says the Apostle, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

With regard to the actual carrying on of this warfare, there is a variety of condition in the soldiers. Some are deeply engaged in the midst of the fight. But two other parties are here mentioned. The one is entering the field, the other is marching out of it. The one is putting on his harness, the other is putting it off.

Now there is a great difference between these, and it requires a difference of feeling. Prayer more becomes the one, and praise the other. The ending signifies relaxation, and joy, and triumph; the beginning demands application, and diffidence, and caution. The laurel is to be worn, not by the candidate, but by the conqueror.

Look at the young soldier arming, and at the old warrior laying down his weapons, and you will soon see why the former should not glory like the latter. Let him that is putting off the harness exult—His privations, hardships, dangers, are all past. His foes

are vanquished. His labours are over. His character is formed. His fidelity is proved. His firmness has been displayed. While he had fightings without, he sometimes had fears within; but, true to his cause, he said, If I perish I perish. Whatever he suffered, he scorned to desert his post. Yet an honourable dismissal seemed desirable: and now it is arrived; and with his scars of honour he is returning home to receive the prize, and to review and talk over the interesting scenes of all his campaigns.

But let him that is putting on his harness remember that he has *not* borne the burden and heat of the day—that his destitutions, and watchings, and perils, are yet to come—that his snares are not yet escaped—that his foes are not yet subdued. Though he will finally overcome, the warfare is *to be* accomplished. What weeks and years of painful struggle may intervene! He may sleep, and be surprised. The enemy may thrust sore at him, and gain an advantage over him; and in consequence of the injury, he may go halting all his days.

We say therefore to those who are commencing the Divine life—We are far from wishing to dismay you—we rather say, Go, and the Lord be with you. But the Saviour himself tells you to sit down, and count the cost, and estimate your resources for the war. A new and untried course is often flattering; and inexperience genders presumption.

Peter fell by self-confidence. Joseph was preserved by conscientious alarm—And blessed is the man that feareth always. Not with that fear which implies cowardice, but with that which excludes carelessness; not with that fear which chills and freezes exertion, but with that which leads us to a survey of difficulties

and to preparation for the trial; not with that fear which diminishes hope, but with that which forbids boasting—"Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."

DECEMBER 21.—MORNING.

"Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." JOB x. 2.

A GOOD man perceives and acknowledges the hand of God in his afflictions. Job sees God contending with him. Though his sufferings were principally from creatures, he said, "The Lord hath taken away." "Thou hast taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces." Whatever may form the twigs of the rod, God is the chastiser—He has a right to correct, and can never err in using it. To realize this is the way, not only to prevent despondency, but to repress all murmuring passions. This satisfied Eli: "It is the Lord, let *him* do what seemeth him good." "Oh!" says the gardener, as he passes down the walks, and is priding himself on the beds and borders which he has so carefully cultivated; "who removed that plant? who gathered this flower?" His fellow-servant says, "The master." And he is dumb, and opens not his mouth, because *he* did it.

Again—God has an end to answer by his contention with us. It is not the display of his sovereignty. There is a distinction between bestowing favours and inflicting penalties. If a judge condemned a man, to shew that he *was* a judge; or a king imprisoned a

man to shew that he *was* a king; every one would cry out against them: but they would be more than justified in employing such measures for the display of justice, and for the advantage of ensample. Paul conveys a degree of censure where we should have looked only for tenderness: The fathers of our flesh chastened us for a few days after their own pleasure. But God, says he, always does it for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. Why is the ship in danger? Because Jonah has fled from the presence of the Lord; and the wind is sent after him. Why does Israel flee before the men of Ai? There is an Achan in the camp. Thus God explains the thing himself: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." He therefore does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. There is some sin indulged; some duty neglected; some idol adored. But his aim may be, not only to rebuke for actual evil, but to hedge up our way with thorns, to keep us from the forbidden ground, towards which we are advancing; or to prune us, as vines, that we may bring forth more fruit.

—God alone can discover his own intentions in his rebukes. In doing this, we are not to suppose that he will employ miracles; or speak in an audible voice from heaven; or strike by a sudden impulse. He acts in a way suited to the nature and improvement of a rational and moral being. He may, therefore, in shewing us his design, use even an enemy. When Shimei cursed David, David considered him as much sent of God to reprove him as Nathan had been. The

will of God may be made known by the admonitions of a pious friend, who sees what we overlook, from habit, or self-love. We should therefore be thankful when the righteous smite us; and not deem them enemies because they tell us the truth. Sometimes the nature and circumstances of the affliction itself proclaim the secret; and we can see the cause in the effect, the sin in the punishment. The faithful word, read or preached, comes home to our case; and conscience cries, Thou art the man. Sometimes the difficulty of discovery is great. But if we address ourselves to the Father of lights, sincerely and importunately, to shew us wherefore he contendeth with us, we shall not seek in vain. The promise given to Jeremiah shall be fulfilled in us: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

—And very desirable it is that we should know why he contendeth with us. Indeed a good man cannot be satisfied without it. For while the wicked are only anxious to escape from trouble, he wishes to profit by it. He desires this knowledge, therefore, not to gratify curiosity, but to enable him to justify God in his dispensations—and to know how to pray—and to exercise the graces of the condition he is in—and to apply to present duty—and that he may confess whatever is wrong, and watch against it in future: saying, "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement; I will not offend any more. That which I see not, teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more." For there is a tenderness in the conscience of a renewed man that readily responds to God. No sooner did

our Lord turn and look upon Peter, than he went out and wept bitterly.

As for an unconverted man to ask God in his affliction to shew wherefore he contends with *him*, it is absurd. It would defeat the end of his suffering, which is, not to make him leave a particular sin, but all sin; and to draw him into a new course, and a new state.

But perhaps, though living in sin, you say, God is not contending with you. So much the worse. He is saying, "They are joined to idols; let them alone." Though he spares you now, he will deal with you hereafter. And the longer the arrear, the severer the reckoning. "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

DECEMBER 21.—EVENING.

I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

1 TIM. ii. 8.

"I WILL," says the proverb, "is for the king." And *this* is for the King—the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, the blessed and only Potentate. Paul is inspired by him, and speaks in his Name. And though, in many cases, for love's sake he only entreats and beseeches, here, to shew his Divine authority, he commands—"I will." Prayer is the subject. We must not only take heed how we hear, but how we pray: some ask and have not, because they ask amiss. Here the enactment prescribes the manner in which it is to be performed. Prayer is to be offered with four qualities or characters.

The First is, universality ; I will that men pray—"everywhere." In the sanctuary, the house, the closet, the field, the road. The expression demands constancy. If we are to pray everywhere, we must pray and not faint ; and pray without ceasing. And this is expressly enjoined by him who knows the importance and benefit of prayer ; and that we can *never* safely dispense with it. Had Peter prayed in the judgment-hall, he would not have denied his Master. But while it requires constancy as to performance, it excludes partiality as to situation, and opposes superstitious restraints. This intimation was necessary. The world was then full of people who made the efficacy of prayer to depend upon local claims. Heathens always attached the presence of their gods to particular places, consecrated to their service ; and we know what long and painful journeys some now take to pay their devotions. Among the Jews God chose Jerusalem to put his name there, and required all the males three times a year to repair thither. Various purposes were to be answered by the appointment ; but the Lord had said by Moses, "In *all* places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." And by Isaiah he said, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool : where is the house that ye built unto me ? and where is the place of my rest ? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord : but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." And as the Christian dispensation was drawing nearer, "from the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among

the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts." Think of this, ye who imagine that God is only to be found in your particular enclosure. When will you believe, that "neither in this mountain," nor yet at Jerusalem, shall men worship the Father: "but the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him"? "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him."

The Second is, purity—"with holy hands." "If I regard iniquity in mine heart," says David, "the Lord will not hear me." Solomon also says, "He that turneth away his ears from hearing the law, even his prayer also shall be an abomination." And so consonant is this to common reflection, that the blind man could say, "We know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth." But some distinction here is necessary. The reference cannot be to perfect purity. If none were to pray but those who are completely holy, no one could approach God: for in many things we offend all; and there is not a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not. What is the experience of every true suppliant? "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "What I see not teach thou me." "See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." And this must be the case. The man who lives in any loved or known sin is only a hypocrite in devotion. He cannot be

sincere in his addresses to God: he therefore insults him only by pretence. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." Of this there was a type in the ritual of the Jews; they were always to wash their hands in water before they engaged in the service of God. To this the Psalmist alludes when he says, "I will wash my hands in innocency, so will I compass thy altar, O Lord." And that prayer is not an atonement for a sinful life, or a substitute for a moral one, hear the language of God to the Jews in the days of Isaiah. "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil." Yet some not only pray and sin too, but make the one a cloak for the other. The Pharisees devoured widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers. But in many cases these things do not long remain in company: in general, the common maxim is verified, "Sinning will make a man leave off praying, or praying will make a man leave off sinning." And their separation is better than their union. It is better not to call upon a benefactor, than to go and spit in his face, or wound him in his own dwelling. The entire neglect of some duties would produce less injurious effects on the conscience of the man himself, and on the minds of others, than the combination of them with wicked practice. "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." "I would thou wert either cold or hot."

The Third is, kindness. This is expressed by the exclusion of its opposite, "without wrath." This will take in those who may be free from vice and immorality, and yet have tempers by no means like the mind of Christ; who not only rail, but pray at others: who bring their rancorous spirit into the worship of God, and would consecrate their envy, malice, and all uncharitableness, upon the altar of devotion. But that altar does not sanctify every gift. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." Though Elisha was animated by religious zeal; yet, as there was some passionateness of his own mixed with it when he said to Jehoram, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee;"—the spirit of prophecy could not descend upon him, till he had called for a minstrel to compose and soften him. What can we do without the help of the Holy Spirit? But that Spirit is a spirit of love, and is held forth by the emblem of a dove. Therefore says our Apostle, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

The Fourth is, confidence. This is also negatively

expressed : without “doubting.” This requires us to pray in faith. “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.” “Let us draw near in full assurance of faith.” This is very distinguishable from a personal persuasion of our actual interest in Divine things ; but it is an encouragement against despair. We are to believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him ; that we are as welcome as we are unworthy ; that he waits to be gracious, and never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain. It also takes in a belief of the lawfulness of what we implore. I could not pray in faith, if I prayed for assistance and success in any enterprise which his word forbids ; or in asking to be saved, without being sanctified : for “this is the will of God, even our sanctification.” “This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.”

We talk of being humbled for our sins—What think we of our duties ? Can we reflect even upon our holy things, even upon our prayers themselves, and not cry, “Enter not into judgment with thy servants, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified” ?

DECEMBER 22.—MORNING.

“And call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable.”
ISA. lviil. 13.

THIS is to characterize the heirs of an exceeding great and precious promise here subjoined. They are to be known, not by their observance of the Lord’s day only, but by their endeared and exalted

regard for it—They call the Sabbath a delight ; and the holy of the Lord—honourable. And what reason they have for this will appear from its leading aspects and bearings.

Let us connect it with the brute creation. Any thing that tends to make *them* happier will be pleasing to a benevolent mind, especially since we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain ; and was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Though man is the lord of this lower world, and all creatures are put under his dominion, he is not to oppress and enslave them. If his power over *them* be abused, and his tender mercies towards *them* be cruel, God will resent it. These helpless beings are his creatures and his care. I love to hear him telling the fretful prophet, as a reason why he spared Nineveh, that there were in it not only “more than six score thousand persons that could not discern between their right hand and their left,” but “also much cattle.” I love to hear him forbidding the Jewish husbandman to muzzle the ox while treading out the corn. I love to read the tenderness of the Fourth Commandment—“That thine ox and thine ass may rest as well as thou.” If the brutes had reason, they would all bless God for the Sabbath.

We may view the Sabbath in reference to the business of life. In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread, till thou return to the dust, was the sentence passed upon man for sin : but, in judgment, God remembers mercy. Who could bear incessant application and toil ? Some change is obviously wanting, to unbend the mind and the body. And man goes forth to his work and to his labour until the evening :

when he returns home and retires to rest; and his sleep is sweet, whether he eats little or much. But this is not all. The Sabbath furnishes a fixed pause; a needful relaxation. Those who are in easy circumstances, and, like the lilies of the field, toil not, neither do they spin, feel little interest in the Sabbath, on this account. But let them think of thousands of their fellow-creatures. Let them think of those who, by mental pursuits and professional engagements, get their bread by the sweat of the brain. Let them think of those who sit at the loom, stand at the forge, work in the field, drudge under ground. What a relief, what a privilege, is one day in seven felt by them! How dull would be the monotony of their time, without the break and variety of the Sabbath! What a drag would their life be, if they were to carry their loads unloosened even to the grave! But the day of repose returns: the worn labourer lays down his burden; stretches his limbs; refreshes himself by cleanliness and change of raiment; and after six days, during which he is almost reduced to the brute, on the seventh he feels himself to be a man. And, O ye rigid, if not sanctimonious souls, envy not the sons and daughters of drudgery and confinement a little of the fresh air of heaven, which you, perhaps, can always breathe! nor be too severe with those who only once a week can look forth and glance on the beauties of Nature—the very works, too, of Him, who ordained the Sabbath!

This day also contributes to the harmony of families. The members may be much divided and dispersed through the week, and have few or slender opportunities of social intercourse. But the Sabbath brings them more fully together; and produces and

cherishes those feelings which endear and unite them relatively; and dispose them, by love, to serve one another. Persons and families are, especially among the common people, always unkind, and rude and savage, both in their temper and manners, where the Sabbath is neglected. But they are respectful, and humane, and tender, where it is observed; because they see each other to advantage, and mingle under moral and religious impressions, which, though not always powerful enough to sanctify, contribute to soften and civilize.

The Sabbath is also a period of devotion and reflection. If we are godly, we shall not go through the week without God. Some pious thoughts and feelings will blend with all our busy concerns. But week-days are, in a sense, worldly ones; and even our allowed contact with earthly things tends to impair our heavenly impressions, and make us forgetful of our highest good. We want a day of retreat from this world, that we may think of another, and have opportunities to compare the claims of the various objects that court our hearts. We want a day of silence from the passions, to consider more deeply the principles and motives of religion; and to have excited and carried upward, those affections which cleave unto the dust. To a man concerned to advance in the divine life, how welcome is the return of a day, all for his soul and eternity! in which, by waiting on the Lord, his strength is renewed, and his heart is enlarged; and he obtains fresh preparations to meet the temptations, the duties, and the troubles of life.

Again: without the aid of such a day, how would even the face of religion be maintained in the com-

munity at large? We may learn from an enemy. When the French wished to destroy every thing like Christianity, they were wise enough to know how much the Sabbath stood in their way; and therefore abolished it, and established their decades. Let any one imagine the Lord's day given up for a time in our own country. The effect would be a thousand times more injurious to the interests of piety and morality than all the writings and attempts of infidelity. Let this fence of every thing sacred and useful be broken down, and what an inundation of ignorance and vice of every kind would overspread the land! It is in the services of this day the rich and the great are reminded of their accountableness; their dependence on God; and their being only on a level with those below them, in their origin and end. This they are too prone to forget: but once in the week the master is a servant; the king a subject; the judge a criminal, crying for mercy. And as to the poor and working classes, how little time have they for religious exercises but the Sabbath! It is then principally the Bible is taken down from the shelf; and the child, placed between the knees, is heard to read it. Then the children of our Sunday-schools cry Hosannas in our temples. Then the family goes to the house of God in company. Then the poor have the Gospel preached unto them; and the common people, unless the preacher misrepresents him by his fineness, again hear the Saviour gladly. How, without these auxiliaries, would a sense of the Divine presence, and the moral providence of God, and of a future state, be kept alive in the minds of the multitude? Is not all the knowledge of religion thousands

possess derived from what they read and hear on the Sunday ?

And how impressive and interesting is the Sabbath as the chief period of Divine operations ! How distinguished will it be in the annals of eternity ! How many thousands, how many millions, on this day have been awakened, enlightened, converted, made new creatures ! What triumphs has the Cross gained over the powers of darkness ! What noble schemes and enterprises, for the glory of God, and the welfare of mankind, have taken their rise from some impression in the closet, or excitement in the Church, on this accepted time, this day of salvation !

Nor is it less delightful and honorable as an emblem of heaven, and a preparation for it. Philip Henry would often say, at the close of his Sabbath devotions—Well : if this be not heaven, it must be the way to it. Yes ; it is then Christians often feel themselves, like Jacob in his vision, at the gate. They have earnest and foretastes of the glory to be revealed. Perhaps they are never so willing as then to go. Many of them have wished to be released on this day ; and many have been gratified. But if they do not leave on the earthly Sabbath, they enter on the heavenly one. For there remaineth a rest, a sabbatizing, as the word is, to the people of God. And what an exchange for the better ! Here we worship with a few ; and these, like ourselves, are imperfect. Here we groan, being burdened ; and if we are not weary of our divine work, we are soon wearied in it. And, when—satisfied with favour, and filled with the blessing of the Lord, we can say,

“ My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this,”

the world calls us down, and leads us out into its cares, and griefs, and dangers again. Oh! why do we not sing—

“Thine earthly Sabbaths, Lord, we love ;
But there’s a nobler rest above :
To that our lab’ring souls aspire,
With ardent pangs of strong desire.

“No more fatigue, no more distress,
Nor sin, nor hell, shall reach the place ;
No groans to mingle with the songs
That warble from immortal tongues.

“O long-expected day! begin ;
Dawn on these realms of woe and sin :
Fain would we leave this weary load,
And sleep in death to rest with God!”

DECEMBER 22.—EVENING.

“And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”

2 KINGS vi. 15—17.

THE king of Syria had resolved to punish Elisha, because as a prophet he divulged to the king of Israel all his warlike plans and designs, and thereby prevented the accomplishment of them. How sin infatuates!—otherwise a moment’s reflection might have convinced him that the same God who had given Elisha supernatural knowledge could afford

him supernatural protection. Yet, finding upon inquiry that the prophet was now in Dothan, "he sent thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about."

Elisha's servant first discovers the danger. But who was this servant? We have no reason to believe that it was now Gehazi, whose avarice, fraud, and lying, his master had lately so awfully punished: "The leprosy, therefore, of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." Even exclusive of his distemper, Elisha would not have had such a servant any longer about him; but have said with David before him, "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight." Of the name of his new servant we are not informed; but it is here said, he "rose up early in the morning." New servants often behave best at first, especially in the article of early rising. Perhaps, however, it was a continued thing with him. This will be the case with a wise and good servant. By means of this, he will do his work with ease and order. What confusion and hurry are often produced by beginning the concerns of the day an hour or two later, for the precious privilege of a little more insensibility!

What happened? When the servant had gone forth, and saw the horses and chariots, he ran back breathless, and exclaimed, "Alas! my master! what shall we do? We are in the hands of our enemies, and there is no way of escape."

Yet if the servant be terrified, the master is calm, and fears no evil. But a godly man wishes others to be satisfied as well as himself; and he is no better than a brute, and wholly unworthy of his service, who feels no concern for the accommodation and comfort of his servant. To tranquillize him, therefore, Elisha said, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." This only filled him with astonishment, for he saw no defenders of any kind near him.

But "Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." What a number of reflections here offer themselves to our minds!

What were these horses and chariots of fire? The angels of God. "And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." These were the convoy of Elijah. These were the body guard of Elijah. When Jacob went on his way the angels of God met him; and when he saw them he said, "This is God's host." "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

We behold here an instance of the dominion and agency of God, in the opening of this man's eyes. He can suspend the use of any of our powers, or he can increase the use of them. He that endued us with the five inlets of perception, called the senses, could, as far as we know to the contrary, have given us fifty, as distinguishable from each other in their operations and objects as hearing and seeing. And who can tell, as Baxter (not the divine) intimates

but that there is a faculty in the human system as adapted to an intercourse with the invisible world as our known senses are suited to the material existences around us, but which power is dormant unless when, for some important end, it is called into exercise? We are very imperfectly acquainted with the mechanism of our physical constitution; and especially with the boundaries and contents of body and mind: for we are fearfully and wonderfully made. One conclusion is obvious—That it is irrational to deny the *reality* of every thing our present senses do not recognize. This valley was filled in the same way *before* the man could see it: his sight did not bring thither the celestial array, but only discerned it. Every sound, even thunder itself, is a nonentity to the deaf; fragrance has no existence as to the perception of those who are incapable of smelling; the colours of the rainbow might be denied by the blind: because they cannot hear or feel them. It has therefore been fairly argued from analogy, that there may be numberless objects, real and near us too, but which, only for want of a suitable medium, we do not apprehend. As for those who believe the Scriptures, as well as the power of God, *they* must acknowledge that there is another world, and that there are agents whose influence is seldom or ever *perceived* by us, who yet have alliances with us, and are concerned in our affairs. May the Father of our spirits prepare us for a world of spirits!

We also here see the disadvantage of ignorance. In darkness we easily mistake every thing; and are sure to magnify whatever we suspect to be injurious. What therefore we deem some sprite or monster, upon the increase of light subsides into a stone, or

root of a tree, or a harmless animal. This man's perturbation arose from his ignorance; as soon as he knew the *truth* of things, as soon as he saw things as they *really were*, he was tranquillized—And is not this the way to tranquillize Christians? Do not their alarms originate in their want of clearer views in religion? "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee; because thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." They that "know" whom they have believed will be "persuaded that he is able to keep that which they have committed to him against that day."

And how safe are the Lord's people even in the midst of danger! He is a wall of fire round about them. He is the shield of their help, and the sword of their excellency; and their enemies shall be found liars unto them. Let us ascertain that we belong to him; and, realizing our privilege, exclaim, "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." "If God be for us, who can be against us?" **THEY THAT BE WITH US ARE MORE THAN THEY THAT BE WITH THEM.**

DECEMBER 23.—MORNING

"As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there;
all my springs are in thee." PS. LXXXVII. 7.

THIS is spoken of Zion; and shews us the *joy*, and the *attachment*, of her inhabitants.

The joy is expressed in language according with the forms of service in the Jewish worship. They had, in addition to the praises of individuals and families, orders of men, established expressly for the

performance of psalmody in the Temple; some vocal and some instrumental—"As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there." The meaning is—That Zion, which the world considers the metropolis of sadness and gloom, should be the residence of cheerfulness and mirth; or, in other words, that the Church of God should abound with spiritual joy and gladness. This joy may be considered two ways. First, as promised: and so it is to be viewed as a privilege; and we are to look after it in the history and experience of his people. And if we turn—and this is the fairest way—to those whom God has himself described in his word, we shall find them distinguished by nothing more than this experience. They walked in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. Though they had losses and afflictions, yet, believing, they rejoiced with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.—Secondly, as commanded. Thus they are enjoined to shout aloud for joy; to rejoice in the Lord always; to be filled with the Spirit; speaking to themselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs; singing, and making melody in their heart to the Lord. And thus it becomes a duty: and, as such, we are bound to seek and to preserve it; to study the grounds of it; to guard against every thing that would invade and injure it; to endeavour, by all means, to increase our joy in the Lord; and never *refuse* to be comforted. All must be singers and players on instruments here. All cannot perform equally well: but all must do something, and pray and strive, to shew that the religion of Christ is able to make its possessors happy; that it can set their roving hearts at rest; that it can enable them to dispense with the dissipations of the world; that it can

sustain them under the trials of life, and raise them above the fears of death; and thus adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things.

But here is attachment as well as joy—"All my springs are in thee." No affection was ever more sincere than that which the pious Jews bore to their native land. Jerusalem was the source of their hope and glory; the circle and the centre of all the endearments of life. They breathed out their very soul when they said, "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces." They deemed nothing too dear to be parted with, for its ornament or defence. In its welfare, they forgot their personal and relative sorrows; and when it was taken, and destroyed, they abandoned themselves to grief, hung their harps upon the willows, and felt life a burden. Even in its reduced state, they took "pleasure in her stones, and favoured the dust thereof"—Each of them sighing, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." And is there less intenseness of regard in Christians towards Jerusalem which is above, and free, and the mother of us all? No—all their springs are there—All that refreshes me—can each of them say; all that revives, all that enlivens, all that inspires—"all my springs are in thee."

Where are all the springs of a worldly man? In the world. To all his interests there, he is alive; his heart is glad when his corn and wine increase; and his joy fails with them. His losses are the taking away of his gods; and what has he more? But what is the experience of the Christian? In the word of

God, and the ordinances of his house, and communion with his people, and the consolations of his Spirit—here it is, says he, I find my heaven! If this cannot touch and animate him, nothing, for the time, can. On the other hand, this can make him joyful even in tribulation. This seems to indemnify him under every earthly disappointment. What is it, says he, that my schemes fail, if his flourish? Yea, in spiritual darkness, and when he is ready to conclude that he has no part or lot in the matter, and that his heart cannot be right in the sight of God, his countenance is illumined, and the tear of joy starts into his eye, when he hears that the word of the Lord hath free course and is glorified; that sinners are fleeing to the Saviour as doves to their windows; that the order to Zion is issued, Enlarge the place of thy tent: lengthen her cords, strengthen her stakes. In this, says he, I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. And so, when there are apostacies and backslidings, and professors cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of, he is "sorrowful for the solemn assembly, and the reproach of it is his burden." And his fear, as well as his hope and his grief, as well as his pleasure, shew where the attraction of his heart lies. And if any thing is to be done for Zion, he feels a courage that is not natural to him. His tongue is as the pen of a ready writer. His hand gets suddenly into his pocket; and, to his power, yea, and beyond his power, he is willing to communicate; and his zeal, as well as all his other feelings, justify his saying, "All my springs are in thee."

DECEMBER 23.—EVENING.

"Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord."

JER. XXX. 21.

THIS is spoken, if not immediately, yet ultimately and supremely, of him to whom gave all the prophets witness.

Observe his work—It was to "approach" unto God. This he did as a man. How often do we read of his praying, which, with him, was never any thing less than a drawing near to God! But he is here spoken of as the Mediator, and in the character of the High Priest of our profession. This was precisely the priest's business of old; it was to approach God mediatorially. Hence says God, "I will be sanctified in all that come nigh me." So when the persons of the priests are spoken of, it is said to Aaron, "Whosoever he be of thy seed in their generation that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God. For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach." I dwell not here on the grounds of this exclusion, some of which were physical, some moral, some typical; but remark their work, to "offer," to "approach." And how? If the high priest had gone into the holy of holies, where God resided between the cherubim, without a sacrifice, he would have rushed upon a drawn sword. Therefore he first slew the victim, and then took the blood in a bason, and went in and sprinkled the mercy-seat, and burnt incense; upon which he came forth and blessed the people. Thus Jesus entered into the holy place, there to appear in the presence of God for us; not without blood: and not with the blood of bulls, and

of goats, but with his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. There he entered, after making reconciliation for the sins of the people, to intercede for us, on the foundation of his atonement, and from thence to command the blessing, even life for evermore, on the Israel of God. But there was this difference between the type and the reality. The high priest of old offered for his own sins, as well as for those of the congregation. But Jesus had no personal guilt. He was harmless, holy, undefiled; and therefore he only bore *our* iniquity. The high priest offered oftentimes the same sacrifices, because they could not make the comers thereunto perfect: but Jesus, by the one offering up of himself, hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

For the accomplishment of this work he "engaged his heart." Here we see willingness. His undertaking would not have been accepted, unless it had been voluntary. But he was not constrained; he said, Lo! I come to do thy will, O God. I delight to do thy will; yea, thy law is within my heart. The engaging of his heart expresses the strength of his affection and the firmness of his determination. The latter of these sprang from the former, and served to display it. Consider what he had to endure for thirty-three years as a man of sorrows; what he had to suffer in delivering us from the wrath to come, being made a curse for us. Yet though he knew all, he turned not away his back; yea, as his tremendous agony drew near, he said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" The reason was, that perfect love casteth out fear. Love produces courage, even in the fearful bird and the timid sheep. They

will attack their foe to defend their young. But how the mother ventures and hangs, regardless of danger, over the infected body of her child! Love is strong as death: many waters cannot quench love; neither can the floods drown it. But no love will bear a comparison with his—"the love of Christ passeth knowledge."

And is he not worthy of attention? "Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord"—Who indeed? "He is a wonder to all, both below and above." Many were astonished at him. Many treated him with scorn. He was to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness. Numbers do not feel their need of him; though he is the way, the truth, and the life. He is still despised and rejected of men. But he was seen of angels; and all the angels of God worship him. They find nothing in the annals of eternity, and in the records of the universe, that will bear a comparison with his sufferings and glory. Therefore they desire to look into these things; and every fresh gaze excites them to exclaim with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." And to them that believe he is precious. They inquire, with joy and praise, "Who is this?" And they can return an answer to themselves—He is fairer than the children of men. He is the chief of ten thousand. He is altogether lovely. He is the consolation of Israel. He is the friend of sinners. He is a benefactor whose heart is made of tenderness, whose bowels melt with love. He is the King of glory. He is Lord of all. But who can declare his generation?

No one knoweth the Son but the Father—He views him with infinite complacency. "Behold," says he, "my servant whom I uphold: mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth." "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." "He hath put all things under his feet."

The question may be asked subordinately with regard to the Christian, as well as with regard to Christ. There is a connection and a resemblance between them; and they also are for signs and for wonders. They do not indeed approach God in a way of atonement. The work is done. The propitiation has been made, and we have only to plead it: the righteousness has been brought in, and we have only to submit to it. *He* opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers; and they have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. And this is their duty, their privilege, their character—they draw near to God; and they value ordinances as the means of communion with him.

For each of them has engaged his heart to do this. And it is this that yields him pleasure in the exercise, and carries him through all difficulties and discouragements—"When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart answered, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." "O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise."

But "who is this that has engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord." A creature once far off, but now made nigh by the blood of Christ: once regardless of the things that belonged to his peace, now seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. The subject of an internal

warfare; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. The bearer of many afflictions. The scorn of the world. The most excellent and important creature upon earth. The heir of glory. The dignitary of eternity. "What? know ye not that the saints shall judge angels?"

DECEMBER 24.—MORNING.

"Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

LUKE I. 78, 79.

WELL said David, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him; and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" He does this in a thousand ways; and each of us may acknowledge, with Job, "Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit." But what a visit is here! Twice does Zacharias, under different allusions, expressly mention it in his thanksgiving song. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." "Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Observe the image under which he views the coming of the Saviour—"The dayspring from on high." The springing of the day is produced, and only can be produced, by the rising of the sun. There is only one sun in nature. And there is only one Sun in

grace. And to them that fear my Name, said God, by the prophet Malachi, shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.

See the state in which he finds us—"Sitting in darkness and the shadow of death." Darkness is ignorance. Some ignorance is of little importance: but here we are destroyed for lack of knowledge. The darkness is connected with the shadow of death—a state of terror, and danger, and nearness to perdition; for the shadow cannot be far from the reality. It is not only vain, but injurious, to deny the truth of this representation. Every thing concurs to prove it. And, without the admission of it, Christianity must be needless if not absurd.

But see the benefit he is designed to communicate—"To give light" to them that are in darkness and the shadow of death. Accordingly, his coming has shed a lustre upon every subject interesting to our duty and welfare. So that every individual under the Gospel knows far more than all the Heathen philosophers united. And also far more than the most illuminated among the Jews. Hence our Saviour turned unto his disciples, and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

It is therefore called, not only "the true light;" but "a great light." It has two properties. It is *practical*. It is "to guide our feet." We were "sitting" before; inactive, like persons in the dark, and afraid to move: but when the light comes, we

are set in motion. The doctrine of Christ is not a mere speculation. He that receives it feels an influence resembling that of the orb of day; which is vital as well as enlightening—He walks in the Spirit. In the fear of the Lord. In the truth. It is also *blessed*. It is to guide our feet “into the path of peace.” There is something very pleasing in the word Peace, as it intends reconciliation; and especially reconciliation with God. And God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. And being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This peace is essential to every other blessing; and every other blessing is sure to follow it. The word, therefore, is often used for every kind of good and of happiness. It is finely expressed by the Apostle, “We who have believed do enter into rest;” and yet more fully by David, “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy Name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted.”

But what is the source of all this blessedness? “The tender mercy of our God.” As we are guilty and condemned creatures, every gift we enjoy must be from mercy. This is true, of our daily and outward comforts: and therefore Jacob calls them all “mercies;” and acknowledges that he is not worthy of the “least” of them. How true is it, then, that not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by his mercy he saved us!—Neither are we to imagine that God was made merciful by the incar-

nation and sufferings of Christ. It is from injudicious representations of this kind that the enemies of the atonement are furnished with their strongest objection. In the Scripture, we are told that God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. What he requires, he provides. He would not pardon Job's friends but through his intercession. But he prescribed his prayer, with sacrifice for the very purpose, and accepted it. Thus we are "justified freely by his grace, *through* the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Let us bless God for this tender mercy. "God is the Lord, which has shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." Let us improve the advantages it has afforded us, and walk as children of the light. Let us pray that his way be made known on earth, and his saving health among all nations.

DECEMBER 24.—EVENING.

"And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us."

EPHES. v. 2.

THE admonition supposes a relative character. Various are the beings towards whom our love is to be exercised. God takes care for oxen, and hears the young ravens that cry; and a merciful man regardeth the life of his beast, and feels a tenderness even towards all the orders of creatures below his own nature. But we are expressly required to love

our neighbour; and, according to our Saviour's own explanation in the parable, every one *is* our neighbour who needs our aid, and is placed within the reach of our kindness. We are therefore to love our enemies; not indeed with a love of esteem and complacency, which would be impossible, but with a love of benevolence and beneficence; blessing them that curse us, doing good to them that hate us, and praying for them that despitefully use and persecute us. We are also to love sinners, not their sins, but their souls, having compassion, and endeavouring to save, pulling them out of the fire. None indeed have such claims upon our pity and compassion as those who are ready to perish for ever: destruction and misery are in their paths. But while, as we have opportunity, we do good unto all men, we are especially to remember them that are of the household of faith. These are related to us by grace: these are one with us by spiritual and everlasting unions. These have peculiar titles to our affection—These we are to love out of a pure heart fervently: to love as brethren.

For how is this affection to be exercised? We are to "walk in it." The term intends not only activeness and progression, but influence and prevalence. When we say, a man is in liquor, or in a passion, we mean to say that it has the possession and the command of him. We read of "walking in pride;" and we understand by it a man's feeling and behaving vainly and haughtily on all occasions, and in all circumstances. The first Christians "walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost:" the fear and the comfort distinguished, governed, and absorbed them. Walking in love,

therefore, intimates the importance of this disposition, and that we should not be satisfied with an ordinary measure of it. We are not to have love in us, but to be in love; to walk in love. It is to be our element, our actuating principle. It is only in proportion as this prevails that our religion can prosper. This is the fulfilling of the law. This is the end of the Gospel commandment. It is the bond of perfectness—Therefore “let all your things be done with charity.”

And how is it enforced? “Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.” Does the Apostle mean to make the love of Christ our model? or our motive? or both? Unquestionably both.

He means to make it our model, and to say that we are to love others in the same way he loved us. Our love cannot indeed equal his: but it may, it must resemble it; not indeed in all its acts and qualities, but in its source and nature. He loved us really; and we must love, not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth. He loved us expensively; so that, when rich, for our sakes he became poor, made himself of no reputation, and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And are we to shun self-denial? And to make no sacrifices? “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” His love is constant and unchangeable; and we are to continue in his love, and never to grow weary in well-doing.

He means also to make it our motive, and to say, that as he has loved us we are to walk in love, in consequence of this, and because of this. The Apostle does not argue from fear, or mercenariness, or even

the allowed hope of reward ; but urges a consideration the most pure and ingenuous, and at the same time the most powerful. A motive strong as death, and which many waters could not quench. A motive whose efficiency he had himself experienced, and which had served to animate him in every duty, and enabled him to take pleasure in every suffering for Christ's sake—"For the love of Christ," says he, "constraineth us." He therefore could not enforce even a relative duty without a reference to a motive so tender and efficient: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it—"

—"O bleeding Calvary!
The true morality is love of thee."

And here we may see that the difference between a mere moral preacher and an evangelical preacher is, not that the moral preacher enforces good works, and the evangelical preacher does not; for the latter enforces them as much as the former. But it lies here—Both admonish and exhort; but the one waters dead plants, and the other living ones. The one makes the tree good, that the fruit may be good—while the other is seeking to gather grapes from thorns and figs from thistles. The doctrines and the duties, the holiness and the grace, of the Gospel never are found separate.

DECEMBER 25.—MORNING.

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered."

LUKE ii. 1—6.

THE birth of Christ was so wonderful and important, that every circumstance attending it is worthy of our attention, and capable of improvement. We are here informed of the *time* and the *place*.

As to the *time*, it was under the reign of Augustus. Luke could not have distinguished it by a more illustrious mark, than the name of a man, the greatest prince then in the world; as he governed the Roman empire, which had extended itself over the largest and fairest portions of the inhabited earth. What is related indefinitely, is liable to dispute and mistake; whereas, particularity tends to gain credence, and renders falsehood easier of detection. Hence, the Evangelist mentions a remarkable fact attending the period: "It came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed;" and adds, "And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria." Here, however, a difficulty occurs, which Infidelity, always alive to the worst of causes, and feeling the paucity and poverty of its resources, has readily laid hold of.

It must be granted that Cyrenius, as Josephus, and all the Greek and Latin historians, agree, was not

governor of Syria till eleven years after. But, first, it is supposable, that, though he was not the actual governor, he presided on this occasion by a special commission from Augustus. This agrees with the history of the Emperor, which shews us, that, in several instances, he sent his particular friends to superintend the enrolment, without leaving it to the care of the ordinary governors of the province. Did not David do the same when he wished to number the people? There were rulers over all the tribes of Israel; yet he sent Joab, who went through all the land, and brought him the result at the end of nine months and twenty days. Secondly; Dr. Campbell renders it, "And this enrolment *first took effect* when Cyrenius was governor of Syria." Though our version reads "taxing," it is in the margin "enrolling." There was some difference between these. For though the registering was generally with a view to the taxing, yet the latter did not always immediately follow the former: it only laid the foundation for it, by shewing the Emperor the number and wealth of his subjects, whenever he chose to demand soldiers or money. Now though the decree for enrolment was issued eleven years before, it was not *acted upon* till Cyrenius was governor of Syria; and the Roman power, on the expulsion of Archelaus from Judæa, first levied the tax on the Jewish people. We have a similar instance in our own history. William the Conqueror wished to make a survey of the kingdom. This was done in what is called the Domesday Book, and which is still extant. It was *six years in making, in England only; and no payment of taxes was made upon it till twelve years after*. Either of these solutions is perfectly satisfactory; and there is no inconsistency between them—the one does not invalidate

the other. And when to this we add, that the fact itself was notorious; and that Luke could not be deceived, and must have known that he could not be misunderstood at the time; we see another instance of the weakness of Infidel objections. But Luke mentions this affair, not only to authenticate the truth of his narrative, but the Messiahship of Christ. His coming had not only been foretold, but the time of it. We allude to the prophetic declaration of the dying Jacob. When speaking of Judah, he said, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." That is—when he should come, the supreme power should be dislodged from their possession. And here we see the accomplishment of it: for the supreme power had now fallen into the hands of Herod the Idumean, who was exercising his vile tyranny under the favour of the Roman sovereign, master of Syria and Palestine.

The *place* was Bethlehem. It is called the City of David, because there David was born. But the word city, which the Jews used so differently from us, should not mislead us. It was only a small village, in which nothing had occurred to aggrandize it. Here he was brought forth; and not in Jerusalem, or Rome, or any other illustrious place. Was this to intimate that his kingdom was not of this world? What cannot ennoble greatness, greatness can ennoble. How has the birth-place of the Mantuan bard been noticed! How many cities contended for the honour of Homer's birth! The birth of Jesus instantly drew to this village a new star, and sages from the East, and the angel of the Lord, and a multitude of the heavenly host; and has made it to be remembered in

all generations. Therefore said the prophet Micah, "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." That he was to be born here was known and expected, not only by the Chief Priests and Scribes, as we see in their answer to Herod, but even also by the common people, who argued against him, when they supposed that he was *not* born there—"Hath not the Scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"

But let us not forget the occasion of the event. For it was, humanly speaking, the most unlikely thing in the world that Jesus should be born here. For Bethlehem was not the place of Joseph's residence; but Nazareth, in Galilee. But the decree requiring that every one should repair to his own patrimonial city to be enrolled, Joseph being of the house and lineage of David, goes up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, in Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, and Mary with him, being great with child. And so it was, that while they were there, waiting for his registry, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered! Mary thought of nothing but accompanying Joseph. Joseph thought of nothing but obeying the order of the governor. The governor thought of nothing but the mandate of the emperor. The emperor only obeyed his vanity and pride; and yet all these ignorantly, but unitedly, conduced to fulfil the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. How freely men can act! and yet how necessarily! How real, and yet inexplicable, is the concord between human

liberty and the certainty of events! What is contingent where Divine veracity is concerned? How impossible is it that the Scriptures can be broken! How wonderful is the providence of God! By what methods does it conduct its plans to their completion! How easily, and yet how uncontrollably, does it bend to its pleasure all the dispositions and movements of creatures, who, like men in a boat, look one way, and row another!

DECEMBER 25.—EVENING.

"But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

MICAH v. 2.

SOME persons derive honour from the place in which they were born; others confer celebrity upon it. How many places strove for the honour of Homer's birth! The late emperor of France, while besieging Mantua, in Italy, exempted a small neighbouring village from all exactions, in honour of Virgil, whose birthplace it was supposed to be. Nothing can ennoble the Lord Jesus; but he dignifies every thing in connection with him. Capernaum was an insignificant fishing town: yet, because he frequently resided and preached in it, it was exalted unto heaven. Beth-lehem was not remarkable for its buildings, or commerce, or the number of its inhabitants, or fame of any kind. Thus it was "little among the thousands of Judah." But it was aggrandized and immortalized by an event that fixed upon it the eye of Inspiration, that drew towards it in the fulness of time a multitude of the heavenly host, and has rendered it dear and memorable to the Church for ever—the Nativity of the Messiah. 'Out of thee

shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

Let this teach us not to call any thing common or unclean. Let us guard against those prejudices which are derived from worldly grandeur and glory. Jesus was not born in Rome, or in Jerusalem; but, in accordance with all the circumstances of his abasement, in a small and obscure village. And Joseph the saviour of Egypt was taken from prison; and Moses the king in Jeshurun from the ark of bulrushes; and David the great from the sheepfold. The world was evangelized by fishermen from the lake of Galilee. And Jesus said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." "Base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence."

When Herod inquired of the chief priests and scribes where Christ should be born, they answered, In Bethlehem of Judæa. When it was rumoured that he came out of Galilee, his enemies immediately said, "Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was." Thus the place of his birth was not only fixed, but fully known. Yet what could be so unlikely as the accomplishment of the prophecy which had raised this expectation? When Mary conceived, there was not the least probability of her being delivered at Bethlehem—She was in Galilee, living at Nazareth. But

Augustus issues a decree that all the world should be taxed. This required not only that a certain tribute should be paid, but that every man should go to his own city to be enrolled. Hence Joseph went up to Bethlehem, and Mary his espoused wife accompanied him, being great with child. "And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." There is always something wonderful in the works of God. We frequently prescribe a course for him, or we expect him to move in a particular direction: but he brings the blind by a way that they know not; and leads them in paths which they have not known. While we think he is doing nothing, and his promise seems to fail for evermore, his arrangements are formed, his agents are in motion, his designs are fulfilled, and we exclaim, "What hath God wrought! Let us trust, and not teach him; and, whenever he has spoken, believe that if heaven and earth should pass away, his word will not fail."

"Shall he come forth unto me!"—as if he called him and he came. And he did call him; and he said, "I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." He had to act *with* God, and *for* him; to shew forth his righteousness, to vindicate his law, to make reconciliation for the sins of his people, to glorify him on the earth, and to finish the work which he gave him to do. Therefore God calls him "my shepherd." Therefore he says, "I have laid help on one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people."

"Who shall be ruler in Israel." He came into the world to save sinners; but he is a Prince as well as a Saviour. His outward circumstances, at his birth and all through life, seemed to bespeak any thing rather than royal dominion. Yet in this estate he was previously announced: "Behold, my king cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; *lowly*, and riding upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." And the elements, and all creatures, were at his sovereign control. The winds and the waves, diseases, death, and devils, obeyed him. He called Zaccheus, and he came down and received him joyfully. He said to the sons of Zebedee, as they were fishing, and to Matthew, as he was sitting at the receipt of custom, Follow me; and they arose, and forsaking all, followed him. "Art thou a king then?" said Pilate. He answered, "I am a king. But my kingdom is not of this world—Then would my servants fight—But now my kingdom is not from hence." The government of all things is indeed upon his shoulder; and he rules in the midst of his enemies, and makes their wrath to praise him. But his people only are in a proper sense his subjects. They are made willing in the day of his power, and from knowledge and attachment resign themselves to his empire; and he not only reigns over them, but in them, by "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

"Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Surely these words imply and express an existence before his incarnation, and an eternal existence too. The Evangelist bears the same testimony to this interesting truth: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him."

and without him was not any thing made that was made." The Apostle also says, "He is"—not he *was*; "he is before all things, and by him all things exist." It was "the Spirit of Christ" that spake in the prophets. It was Christ the Israelites tempted. It was the reproach of Christ that Moses prized. He appeared in a human form to Joshua and to the patriarchs. But "of old" is not "from everlasting." Who can tell what he did before time had begun to roll? We know that he had a glory with the Father before the world was. We know—

"His busy thoughts at first
On their salvation ran,
Ere sin was form'd, or Adam's dust
Was fashion'd to a man."

One remark results from all this. We see what a wonderful character the Redeemer is, and how constantly the sacred writers combine together his greatness and his abasement. Thus here, while we see him born in Bethlehem, we behold him the king of glory, whose goings forth were from of old, from everlasting. It is his greatness that displays his goodness. He loved us, and gave himself for us. He is a man of sorrows; but it was because the children were partakers of flesh and blood that he likewise took part of the same. *He made himself* of no reputation, and *became* obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Ah! Christians, what you have witnessed to-day will not detract from his glory in your regards. You "know the principle of all this humiliation." You know "THE GRACE of our Lord Jesus Christ: how that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich."

DECEMBER 26.—MORNING.

'And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid."

LUKE ii. 8, 9.

Two classes of men were led to Bethlehem to witness the new-born Messiah—the wise men from the East, and the shepherds. The former were versed in the works of Nature. They were especially astronomers and star-gazers; and God conducts them by a star. The latter were Jews. They had the Scriptures in their hands; and these were directed by an angel. God has various methods of manifesting himself to his creatures; but none of them are arbitrary. They all evince his "wisdom and prudence;" and are adapted to the state and circumstances of the beings with whom he has to do.

Angels are all ministering spirits. And if they attend the heirs of salvation, how much more the Author of it! If they wait on the servants, how much more on the Son, who is Lord of all! When he bringeth his first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. He was seen of angels.

—We might have expected that this glorious messenger would have been sent to persons of rank and authority; to the rulers; to the doctors of the Law; to the ministers of the sanctuary; to Herod; to the high priest. But God's thoughts are not our thoughts. Man judgeth after the outward appearance; but the Lord looketh to the heart. He is no respecter of persons. The distinctions of life, which, owing to folly, are the sources of so much pride to some, and

envy to others, are nothing to Him—He is equally “nigh unto *all* them that call upon him,” whatever be their outward condition: as the sun shines in the valley, as well as on the hill. It was to these shepherds the angel of the Lord appeared. And may not this be considered an intimation of the persons for whom the Dispensation was principally designed, and by whom it would be chiefly received? Hence we read, “The poor have the Gospel preached unto them”—“The common people heard him gladly”—“Have any of the rulers believed on him?”—“Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” Not that the rich and great are excluded. And there always have been a few who have humbled themselves, to be exalted. But “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

We have much reason to conclude, that these shepherds were among the number of those who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem. While many of their countrymen, in ceiled houses, were seeking their consolation in the world, they, like Simeon, were waiting for the Consolation of Israel. Perhaps at this very moment they were silently musing; or perhaps conversing with each other (for they were obviously together) “when the kingdom of God should come;” and sighing out the words of David:

"O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad"—When, "lo! the angel of the Lord came upon them! and the glory of the Lord shone round about them!"

And this angel, by his example, teaches us, however much we may be placed above them, not to overlook the poor, nor refuse to visit them: especially God's poor; for they are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to them that love him. It is a character of the citizen of Zion, that in his eyes a vile person is condemned, however high: but he honours them that fear the Lord, though they may not have the gold ring and the gay clothing.

The sacred historian has not failed to tell us how these men were engaged at the time of their being thus distinguished. They were in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. Thus they were abiding in their calling, and faithfully and actively discharging the duties of it. Never mind how humble your occupations may be—

"Honour and shame from no condition rise:

Act well your part—there all the merit lies."

Be attentive and diligent, and you are useful and respectable. *They* ought to blush, who do nothing, or have nothing to do. Their mode of living is as inconsistent with the life of a Christian required in the Gospel, as a life of vice. The tree that bringeth forth no *good* fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. The servant that hid his Lord's talent in a napkin did not abuse it; but because he was an un-

profitable servant, he was a wicked one, and therefore punished. The case of these shepherds is not a solitary one. Go through the Scriptures, and make out a list of all those whom God favored and dignified with his visits; and shew me one among them all, that was a drone in the community, or not properly and usefully employed. *Other* beings are more likely to appear to the useless and idle. "Our idle days," says Bishop Hall, "are the Devil's busy ones." And Watts says,

"For Satan finds some mischief still,
For idle hands to do."

It was well said by an old Puritan, "I find diligence the best preservative from temptation: for when Satan comes to me with his proposals, I say to him, I cannot attend to thee now—I am so busy."

"The labour of the righteous tendeth to life."
"The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat."

DECEMBER 26.—EVENING.

"Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass,"

LUKE ii. 15.

THIS was the language of the shepherds. And it was not a vain curiosity that led them. While keeping their flocks by night, the angel of the Lord appeared to them; and said, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger." This they considered, as it really was an

order to repair thither, to ascertain and report the fact. And they would have set off instantly. But there suddenly descended a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, good will toward men. We know not how long this melody continued. Yet who can wonder at their staying till it was over? But no sooner were the angels gone away into heaven, than "the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass." Let us accompany them; and contemplate a scene which will induce us to exclaim with Moses, on a very marvellous, but very inferior occasion—"Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?"

In this thing which is come to pass, we behold a very striking display of divine truth. The coming of the Messiah was called "*The truth of God.*" Many things evince the Divine veracity: but this was the main pledge. It was the chief promise ever given to man. It was also the earliest assurance: it was given as early as the Fall. And what a length of time the assurance seemed to hang in suspense! A year—a hundred years—a thousand years—another thousand, and another, and another rolled away before the Seed of the woman appeared! Hath He forgotten to be gracious? Doth his promise fail for evermore? But at the end of four thousand years, it was proclaimed, His councils of old are faithfulness and truth. How many also were what we may

call the minute parts of the promise ! It was foretold that he should descend from a particular nation—the nation of the Jews: a particular tribe—the tribe of Judah: a particular family—the family of David: a particular mother—a virgin. On how many things does the veracity of God now depend, the failure of any one of which would prove him a liar ! The place of his residence was foretold—it was Bethlehem. The prophecy had been recorded for ages, and was acknowledged at the time of his birth. But how many things were necessary to this ; and how accidental seemed the fulfilment ! For Joseph and Mary were residing at Nazareth. And had not Judæa been under the Roman dominion ; and had not Cæsar Augustus proudly wished to know the number and wealth of his subjects ; and had Mary been delivered a few days sooner or later—he would have been born elsewhere, and the word of God would have been of none effect. All these occurrences appear casual, and they were so to the parties themselves ; but not to God : he knows all his works from the beginning. All these events seemed loosely connected : but they were links making an adamantine chain. The truth of God was the pivot on which all turned : the center in which all united : the end to which all referred. Let us see here, not only how willing, but how able he is to accomplish his word ; and be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Let no apparent delay, no opposing difficulties, no interfering interests, affect our minds. His purpose is secretly, yet uncontrollably, moving on ; and the most unlikely instruments are contributing to its execution. How much depends on our confidence in the truth of God !

We see in the thing which has come to pass, a wonderful combination. A combination of natures—I admit his humanity; and why should I question his divinity? I find many things ascribed to him, which cannot belong to him as God; and I find others ascribed to him, which cannot pertain to him as man: and here is the solution of the difficulty—"God was manifest in the flesh." A combination of grandeur and abasement. Whose birth could have been more obscure and degrading? What welcome was given him? What preparation was made for him? "The world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." A poor young female was his mother; a stable, his chamber; a manger, his cradle, because there was no room at the inn. But whose birth was ever so glorious? Ye gods of the earth, bring forth your first-born; but no new star sparkles over where the young child is. No wise men come miraculously from the East to worship him. No angel comes down. No heavenly choir sing his birth. No command is given, Let all the angels of God worship him. No spirit of prophecy breathes inspiration. No Simeon waits for him as the Consolation of Israel. No Anna speaks of him to all those who look for redemption.

We see also a prodigy of benevolence. Every thing says, Behold a love that passeth knowledge! His former condition—he *was* rich, and *became* poor. His independence and choice: he was not *constrained* to enter such a state—Lo! I *come*, says he; he *gave* his life a ransom for us. The principle that moved him—it was not our desert; but his own

mercy. He came into the world to save *sinners* he died for the ungodly: in his love and pity he re-deemed us. His not waiting for our application, arising from a sense of our need of him—His engaging, in foresight of all the degree and extent of his sufferings—His going through the whole, without repenting of the expensive undertaking—His accomplishing it with delight.

Here, also, we see an example for our imitation. Did he thus despise worldly distinctions? and shall we admire them? Shall we seek great things for ourselves?—place such a Christian by the side of the manger! Having food and raiment, let us be there with content. Shall we find it difficult to condescend to men of low estate, and to exercise self-denial in doing good? “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” Did he not only stoop so low, but suffer so much, for us; and shall we not be willing to endure any privations, and incur any sacrifices, for our brethren? “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour.”

Great as this thing is which has come to pass, there are many who will refuse to take a step to see it. Even at the very festival, which is the commemoration of it, they will be found anywhere rather than at Bethlehem. They will be attracted to every thing,

rather than to that sight, which the shepherds left their flocks, and made haste to see; which the Eastern sages came such a vast distance to behold; and which drew all heaven down to earth. Some, while they observe the day by a freedom from labour, not only neglect, but insult the subject of it; and, by intemperance and riot, revive the works of the Devil, which the Son of God was manifested to destroy.

But let us call off our attention from the little, debasing, vexing, defiling things of the world, and repair to the Infant of Bethlehem, the Desire of all nations. Let us give him the glory which is due unto his holy Name; and say, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of peace." Let us behold in him provision made for our recovery, the most suitable to our wants, and the most adequate to our relief; and placed entirely within our reach. Let us embrace him; and exclaim, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him: we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation."

And let our zeal and gratitude be equal to our joy. And let us follow the shepherds not only in our going, but in our return—"And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the child"—"And they returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen."

DECEMBER 27.—MORNING.

"The consolation of Israel." LUKE II. 26.

LET us justify this character of the Messiah.

And here to what shall we appeal? To the language of prophecy? Whenever the prophets would comfort the Jews, they always led them to his coming and his kingdom. Witness Isaiah: "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Witness Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Witness Malachi: "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts."

Or shall we appeal to the experience of Old Testament saints? Abraham rejoiced to see his day. Moses esteemed his reproach greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Job's solace was, "I know that

my Redeemer liveth." David, at the thought of describing him, said, "My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the King: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer." And what said the angel of the Lord to the shepherds? "Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

That he considered himself as the owner of this title, and as deserving it, is undeniable, from the gracious words which proceeded out of his lips. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "In me ye shall have peace." "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." "And ye now therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

And how was he regarded in the first and purest age of the Church? "Whom having," says Peter, 'not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' And says Paul, "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." He makes it one part of the character of the circumcision that they "rejoice in Christ Jesus." Yea, he swears upon the certainty of it; "I protest by *your* rejoicing which I

have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." It would be easy to shew from additional passages how the first Christians, taught by inspired teachers, repaired always and only to him for consolation in whatever circumstances they were found.

And need we wonder at this? What is he? How does the word of truth represent him? Is he not a hiding-place from the storm? The shadow of a great rock in a weary land? A river of waters in a dry place? The bread of life? The robe of righteousness? A light in darkness?

These representations are indeed very figurative; but they are derived from reality. And he for whom Simeon waited more than embodies them all—"The consolation of Israel." Let me glance at four things in particular, concerning which, if he be not our hope, we are hopeless.

What can I do with my guilt without him? I cannot deny that I am a sinner; but the soul that sinneth it shall die. Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them. And what does this curse include? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Who can relieve and comfort me here but he who said, Deliver from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom? Who bare our sin in his own body on the tree, and made peace by the blood of his cross?

What can I do with my depravity without him? For I am not only guilty—my understanding is darkened, my will is rebellious, my affections are earthly and sensual—I feel my weakness—yea, my very heart is alienated from the life of God. And to whom can I apply but to him who is wisdom and

sanctification, as well as righteousness and redemption? He says, My grace is sufficient for thee: my strength is made perfect in weakness. The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us free from the law of sin and death.

What can I do without him in trouble? But this man is the peace when the Assyrian cometh into the land. This brother is born for adversity.

What can I do without him in death? But he can support and comfort me when every other support and comfort *must* fail. Ah! says Simeon, "*Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*"

"Jesus, the vision of thy face
Hath overpowering charms;
Scarce shall I feel death's cold embrace
If Christ be in my arms."

DECEMBER 27.—EVENING.

"The consolation of Israel." LUKE II. 25.

LET us improve this character of the Messiah. If he be the consolation of Israel—

It reminds us of the state of those who, as the Apostle says, "are without Christ." They are lying in wickedness; the victims of guilt and depravity; abandoned to the miseries of life; and all their lifetime subject to bondage through fear of death. They feel their disease in many of its effects, though not in all; but there is no balm of Gilead, no physician *there*. They have recourse to the most painful pilgrimages, and privations, and tortures, to obtain ease and hope: but, amidst doubt and suspicion, lies are

their refuge; the way of peace have they not known; destruction and misery are in their paths—And are they bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh? And do we not pity them? Do we not pray for them? And while we pray that his way may be known on earth, his saving health among all nations, do we not evince, by our exertions and sacrifices, that our prayers are not hypocrisy or formality? *For we have the communication of this knowledge in our power.*

The character invites sinners to come to him. While you neglect him, you are only observing lying vanities, and forsaking your own mercy. Nothing can supply the place of the consolation of Israel. Suppose you prosper in the world, the abundance you possess cannot ease the conscience, or fill the wishes of the mind. You grasp at substance, but seize only vanity. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness. But what will you do in the day of adversity? And how soon may this come upon you! How mortal are your connections! What is your health? What is your life? You are now dreaming, but how will it be with you when you wake?

“O ye gay dreamers of gay dreams,
How will you weather an eternal night,
Where such expedients fail?”

What a mercy that you can yet hear the sound of consolation! Here is a Comforter at hand, able, willing to succour you. Seek him, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

The character hails those who have found him. They were indeed strangers to all true comfort till they acquainted themselves with him. But he that

hath the Son hath life. They are now the happiest beings in the world. They are justified from wrath through him. In his righteousness they are exalted. They rejoice in his salvation; and can leave all their cares in his hand. If the storm rages without, "their minds have heaven and peace within." They know that he will never leave them nor forsake them; that he has provided for every state in which they can be found; that he is now making all things work together for their good; and will soon wipe all tears from their eyes.

But how does the title reproach those who backslide from him! "Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken?" "O generation, see ye the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?" Did he not remember thee when there was none to pity? Did he not deliver thee when there was none to help? Did he not find thee in the road to hell, and turn thy feet into the path of life? Did he not bring thee health and cure after trying physicians of no value? It was a touching expostulation he addressed to the twelve when many turned back, and walked no more with him; "Will ye also go away?" And it was a fine reply; "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." We should only be losers by any exchange we could make.

What can be a substitute for him? The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways. If a fear of reproach or persecution turns you astray from Christ, you may feel such reflection and terror of

conscience, as may make you long for him even in a prison, or at the stake. If the love of gain tempts you, you may get the worldly advantage you seek after; but you will lose the light of his countenance, and the joy of his salvation. Whatever you lean upon instead of trusting in him will fail you, and pierce you through with many sorrows. Yes; we must learn by what we suffer, as well as by what we enjoy, that he is **THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL**. "A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the Lord their God. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel."

DECEMBER 28.—MORNING.

"And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." **LUKE i. 6.**

THIS worthy couple are known as the father and mother of a very illustrious personage; of whom the Judge of all said, "Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." But while Zacharias and Elisabeth derive renown from their son, they are worthy of attention, personally considered. Though not distinguished by worldly grandeur, they were great in the sight of the Lord; and, though their names are not recorded in

the annals of national history, their characters will be had in everlasting remembrance in the Scriptures of truth. Five things are here said of their piety.

—It was sincere—They were righteous *before God*. Many are righteous before men, who only look on the outward appearance: but the Lord, who searcheth the heart, and sees actions in their motives, disowns them. A large assembly may be convened together, and be engaged in the same exercises; but they only worship him who worship him in spirit and in truth. What are we in his estimation? He that judgeth us is the Lord.

—It was practical—They *walked in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord*. Divine truth is important; yet, if we know these things, happy are we only if we do them. Practice is nothing without principle: and what proof have we of the reality and excellency of principle without practice? “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.” We do not undervalue experience; but the Scripture requires something more than good feelings—“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” A good conscience will always be accompanied with a good conversation. He is a vain man who says he has faith and hath not works—Can such faith save him?

—It was impartial—They walked in *all* the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. None are universally wicked. Vices are often inconsistent with each other. Prodigality opposes avarice, and covetousness complains of extravagance. All do something; for conscience must be appeased: but they

are determined in their *selections* by the easiness of the thing, or its relation to some one of their interests. They have no regard to the will of God ; for if their observance sprang from a regard to his pleasure, this would lead them to avoid every thing which he has forbidden, and to inquire after every thing he has enjoined. "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."

—It was irreproachable—They walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, *blameless*. It is not said, they were *sinless*. The subjects of divine grace will always have enough to bewail before God, instead of saying, I have attained, I am already perfect. But it is a mercy (and this is possible) to be preserved from those falls which injure our reputation and influence ; and also from those imprudences which draw upon a man the reproach of folly or weakness, when he is not taxable with sin ; and from those veerings of opinion, which are yet consistent with some degree of fixed principle in higher things. It is well when our good cannot be evil spoken of ; and we are without offence till the day of Christ.

—It was mutual—They were *both* righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, *blameless*. This is not the case in every family. In some houses there is no fear of God in either master or mistress, father or mother, husband or wife. In others there is one of these relations godly, and only one. They who are joined together by marriage, are not one in the Lord. This difference may be accounted for three ways. One of the parties may have been called after their affinity—neither of them knowing God at the time of contracting it. Or one of the parties may

have deceived the other—and some are guarded and crafty—and those who are upright themselves, are generally free from suspicion. Or the religious individual was perhaps (how strange!) careless upon this subject; and did not feel religion, in his choice, the one thing needful: or was bribed, against his conviction, by other things. The two former cases deserve pity; but the third justifies censure. And his error will correct him. For nothing can be more desirable and important than the godliness of *both* parties. How near is the relation! How constant and influential the intercourse! How lamentable, in a course where we need every assistance, to meet with impediments! How can two walk together except they be agreed?—And are there servants? are there children? Each of the superiors will have their adherents. And it is not difficult to conclude, from the depravity of human nature, which will be more readily followed; the one who would lead into the world, or the one who would lead out of it.

But the case would be more awful still if one of the parties was an official character—Surely a Zacharias should have an Elisabeth. What disgrace and injury may result from the union of a preacher with an irreligious or indiscreet companion! The Apostle therefore describes the character of a minister's wife, as well as of his own: and naturally concludes, that he who proclaims his want of piety and judgment in a case so plain and momentous, *tells* how unqualified he is for other matters—"For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?"

DECEMBER 28.—EVENING.

"In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God." HEB. ii. 17.

THERE is indeed one exception. It regards the purity of his nature. This was indispensable; and therefore the Scripture abundantly confirms it, telling us that he was "the Holy One of God;" that "he did no sin;" that "in him was no sin." And our Apostle is not forgetful of it in the connexion before us: "he was in all points tempted like as we are, *yet without sin.*"

But this exception being made, the conformity between him and his brethren is universal and complete. If there be any difference, it is in their favour. Are they partakers of "flesh and blood"? "He himself likewise also took part of the same." "Both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." Are they poor? He had not where to lay his head. Are they reviled? "Reproach," says he, "hath broken my heart." Does the adversary assail them? He urged him to the vilest crimes. Do they complain of successful exertion? He said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought." Have they irreligious connexions? "Neither did his own brethren also believe on him." Are their souls vexed with the filthy conversation of the ungodly? How must he have been grieved, with all his spiritual susceptibilities, when he saw the transgressors! Have they before them the trying hour of death? He knows what it is to die: and, in

the days of his flesh, with strong cryings and tears, said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done"—"In all things he was made like unto his brethren."

And observe the expediency of the dispensation. "It behoved him." What, could they not be admitted to favour without his humiliation and suffering? Was it only proper for them to obtain glory by his shame, riches by his penury, healing by his strokes, and life by his dying? Yes; "it behoved him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Is then necessity laid upon him? Does sovereignty itself submit to a law? Do unbounded excellency and goodness condescend to be circumscribed and regulated? And can we, who are not our own, complain if we are under restraints? Are we to dispense with those rules and decencies which have been established for the safety and welfare of society? Order is essential to happiness. It is allied to all greatness. It is "heaven's first law." God himself is the example of it: he acts by rule. He does not tell us what he could do, but what it "became" and "behoved" him to do; and that he does it not because he would, but because it seemed good in his sight. Let us not deny, dispute, or doubt, the expediency of this economy, because we are unable to perceive all the reasons upon which it is founded. Let us remember how limited our understanding is with regard to every subject; and how limited therefore it must be when it would explore the proceedings of an infinite Being, and where, too,

that Being is engaged in his highest operations. We cannot conclude that a course is right because a man adopts it: yea, the very reverse is oftener to be feared. But we may always safely infer the rectitude of God's conduct from the perfection of his nature. But if he has been pleased to inform us expressly that whatever difficulties, owing to our ignorance, may now attach to it, the plan was, he himself being judge, proper and becoming in him;—surely we ought to honour him with our confidence, and be willing to walk by faith—especially, too, when he engages to explain his dealings after our state of trial and discipline is ended, and—when we can, by humble attention and prayer, discern enough to convince us that he has abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence; and to induce us, from what we see, to exclaim, with regard to what we do not see, “O the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”—“His work is perfect.”

Let us therefore remark the aim and design of this peculiar and expensive constitution—“That he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God.” “Things pertaining to God” mean, the concerns of his mediation; the things in which he was to act with God for us, and with us for God. Without having our nature, he could not have exercised the priesthood at all, for he would have had nothing to offer; and a priest must of necessity have somewhat to offer. But in this nature, and by this abasement and sufferings, he was

“A merciful” High Priest. He *appeared* merciful. He knew that nothing could be done unless he gained for himself our confidence; and he knew

how hard it was, with our consciousness and fears, to gain it. He therefore said, I will convince them of my compassion, and shew them that I prefer their salvation to my own comfort and life. I will go and dwell among them: I will call them to behold me in the manger, in the garden, and on the cross—Will not this suffice? He was *made* merciful. He was rendered capable of the sympathy which can only flow from experience. He only that has been a stranger knows the heart of a stranger. The most humane are those who have been trained to feeling in the school of affliction. The fact is applied to him: "In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." And it is thus we are encouraged to apply to him in the time of need: for though he be passed into the heavens, we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

He was "a faithful" High Priest. Faithful to what? To the prophecies, promises, types, going before? He said, "Lo! I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me." Faithful to his own engagements? He turned not away his back; but as the awful scene approached he said, "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" The main thing is, that he was faithful to the Divine interests; for, as the former article refers to us, so this principally refers to God. He was the mediator between God and man; and had to maintain his honour, as well as to secure our deliverance. Kindness itself may be mis-exercised; absolute mercy may not only be folly and weakness, but injustice, injury, cruelty. Magistrates are to be terrors to evil-doers, as well as a praise to them that do well. The judge is to be no

only merciful, but faithful; and, while he feels for the criminal, he *must* maintain the law, though he may pass the sentence with tenderness in his heart, and tears in his eyes. Sinners were not to be saved as if they had not been guilty, but in a way that should remind them that their lives were given back to them after they had been forfeited; that they had incurred the penalty of the law; that this penalty was founded in equity, and could not be dispensed with; and therefore that our Substitute bore it in his own body on the tree, and redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. Thus sin is condemned in the flesh while it is forgiven, and the law is magnified and made honourable while the offender escapes. Thus mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other; and the claims of rectitude, as well as clemency, provided for: while, as the Apostle adds, "he makes reconciliation for the sins of the people."

DECEMBER 29.—MORNING.

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Job xiii. 15.

THIS is a noble resolution. It supposes suffering, Slaying, here, stands for every loss and infliction he could suffer or forebode. Slaying literally means death: and Job does not exclude this from his supposition. He more than once seems to apprehend it as the consequence of his present malady: I know thou wilt bring me to death—My breath is corrupt—My days are extinct—The graves are ready for me.

Indeed there is not much for him to slay—He has slain my cattle, my servants, my children; he has slain the tenderness of my wife, and the confidence of my friends; he has slain my health—and, if there be any thing more, let him slay it—I can trust him down to the grave, and through it—for I know that my Redeemer liveth—and that in my flesh I shall see God—though my reins be consumed within me.

It professes confidence—"Though he slay me, yet will I *trust in him*." It is obvious from hence that he did not think God was really his enemy. If he had, how could he have trusted in him? He knew nothing of the language of a mystic—"Though I perish, I shall serve thee still—If thou send me to hell, I shall love thee there." These are the sayings of religious madness—and one hour of the suffering they make so light of would bring them to the use of their senses. By the very law of my nature it is impossible for me to regard a Being that I believe determined to make me miserable for ever: and God himself has commanded me to seek after my salvation and happiness—I could not, therefore, acquiesce in my misery without violating his will. Such a state of sublime self-annihilation, therefore, is not possible if it were proper; and it is not proper if it were possible. But it is both proper and possible to believe that natural evil may be converted into moral good; that bodily pain may conduce to spiritual profit; that, though no chastening for the present is joyous, but grievous, it may afterward yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised therewith; that behind a frowning providence he may hide a smiling face; that, though he amputates a limb, it is to save life; and that, in ways

beyond all my conceptions, he can, he will, make all things work together for good to them that love him. And this is what Job means by his confidence.

But it also intimates difficulty—*Though* he slay me, yet will I trust in him. For there is much in searching and awful dispensations to try and check confidence: much to awaken suspicion and fear. When things are agreeable and prosperous, we feel comparatively little difficulty. But when the scene is changed; and the sky overspread; and the clouds return after the rain: when we are stripped, bereaved, abandoned: then we are cast out of his sight; our way is perished from the Lord; and we think our eye will no more see good! When troubles befall others, we go to them, and strengthen their hands in God. We readily deal out the promises to them, and feel inclined to reprove, if they refuse to be comforted. We tell them God is only waiting to be gracious; and will appear to their joy. But when we come into the same condition ourselves, we are unable to follow the advice we have given, and to receive the encouragements we have administered. Thus we incur the censure—"Thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hand; thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees: but now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled." Let us not be too severe with people in affliction. To trust God when we know not what he is doing; when he seems to oppose us; when he presents a sword even to our bosom, and we feel its point: it is, then, verily, no easy thing to hope in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. But Job did this—Yea, says he, in the

midst of every killing providence—though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. Let us, therefore, seek after this confidence in God. For, first, there is nothing so honourable to God. Secondly; there is nothing so beneficial to ourselves. Thirdly; there is nothing so reasonable in itself—for, whatever view we take of God: whether we consider his perfections; or his relations; or his promises; or his past dealings with others and ourselves; the more we shall be induced to say, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.” So true is it—They that *know* his Name will put their trust in him.

DECEMBER 29.—EVENING.

“And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.”

GEN. xlvii. 7.

It was an affecting hour when Jacob, after supposing for so many years that his son was dead, and devoured by wild beasts, received information that he was alive, and governor over all the land of Egypt. At first his heart fainted, and he believed it not. But when he had not only heard the words which Joseph had spoken, but saw the waggons that he had sent to fetch him down, his spirit revived in him, and he said, “It is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die.”—He soon set off. But the journey was formidable to him. The old dislike changes, and cleave to places to which they have been accustomed. He therefore travelled anxiously, and when he came to Beersheba he felt alarmed. But he had recourse to his old and tried relief, prayer. “And God spake to him in the visions of the night, and said, I am God, the God of

thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation. I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes." Three interesting presentations followed the execution of this journey.

The presentation of Joseph to Jacob. "And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up, to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while." Then loosening from the lengthened embrace, which all attempt to enlarge upon would spoil, "he said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive."

The presentation of his brethren to Pharaoh. "And he took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our father. They said, moreover, unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen. And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: the land of Egypt is before thee: in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle."

The presentation of Jacob to Pharaoh. "And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh."—Who can

Reflect upon this event, and not admire the wonder-working providence of God in bringing it to pass? All this was foreseen and foreappointed; but how many agencies were set in motion to produce the result, while the agents themselves were unconscious of the bearing of their respective parts, and were all acting separately from each other, yet all working together!—till at last all the discords issued in the finest harmony; and these were the strains to which it was attuned: "He hath done all things well." "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." "Who-so is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." Art thou tempted to despondence? Do the clouds return after the rain? Seest thou no way of escape? Do means fail? Does the providence of God seem not only to forget but oppose the promise? See Joseph the slave, the prisoner, lately in irons, now prime minister of a powerful and learned nation, presenting his weatherbeaten father, whose fears are new dispelled, and every hope and wish of his long-aching heart more than crowned! Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At evening tide it shall be light.

What did the patriarch on this occasion? "And Jacob blessed Pharaoh."—It was an expression of *salutation* towards a stranger. Good men are not to be uncivil and rude, and pass this off as sincerity and faithfulness. They ought to be the most genteel people upon earth; for they ought to feel in dis-

position the politeness—that is, the readiness to deny themselves, and please and oblige others—which the people of the world express ceremoniously, and often very falsely. The servant of the Lord is to be “gentle towards all men.” And we are enjoined to be “courteous.”—It was an act of *homage* towards a sovereign, whose subject he now was. We are all upon a level before God: but religious equality is not to be carried into our relative and civil concerns. The Scripture supports the distinctions of life, and calls upon us to “render to all their due; honour to whom honour, fear to whom fear.”—It was an expression of *gratitude* towards a benefactor, who had promoted his son, and was now willing to receive all his relations, and provide for them in the most fertile region of his empire. The grace that makes us humble, makes us thankful. And while we acknowledge God as the source of all good, we must not overlook those who are the mediums of it.—It was an act of *supplication* on the behalf of a man who, however highly exalted, stood in need of the favour of God. The less is blessed of the greater. And Jacob was in this respect greater than Pharaoh—He was the servant of the most high God—a prophet of the Lord—and who had obtained the name of Israel because, as a prince, he had power with God as well as with man, and could prevail. He therefore invokes the benediction of God upon him; upon his person, upon his family, upon his government, upon his empire—thus delicately and inoffensively leading him to think of the Supreme Being, and to feel his dependence upon him. What is a palace without the blessing of God? His loving-kindness is better than life.

DECEMBER 30.—MORNING.

"And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?"

GEN. xlvii. 8.

WE may consider the question as an instance of condescension and kindness on the part of Pharaoh. There is something in majesty that overawes and overpowers those who have been brought up remote from it. Pharaoh was the greatest monarch of the age, and Jacob had been a plain man, dwelling in tents, and acquainted only with rustic life and manners; and he was now at a period too late to acquire new modes of address. A true nobleman can disembarass those who address him, and inspire them with decent confidence, without lowering the respect they entertain for him: and this is very much done by seizing something with which the inferior is familiar, and in which he feels more at home. Jacob probably dreaded this interview because of the conversation; the king therefore instantly begins upon his age. This would also be pleasing to Jacob. Old people love to talk of early scenes, and of things *they* saw and heard before others were born. Their years give them a kind of dignity and pre-eminence. Years have in all countries laid a foundation for respect—"Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man."

But let the preacher bring home this question, especially as we are so near the end of another year, to all who are here present. We would not have even females excluded. In this quarter indeed we should feel an impropriety in the question if an answer were to be returned aloud. The age of only

one woman, even when she died, is mentioned in the Scripture—It were rude to pry where secrecy is so sacred. Years are at variance with personal attraction and impression; and many dislike to be reminded of the failure of their reign. But, if by dress and hired tints they try to impose upon others, can they be ignorant themselves? Know they not the real lapse of their time and their influence? Let them therefore be concerned to establish an empire upon something more solid than corporeal charms—Let them cultivate the mind: let them adorn the heart and life with the graces of the Holy Spirit; let them abound in good works; let them with Mary choose the good part that shall not be taken away from them—Thus they will descend even into the vale of age with honour, and be estimable even in the tomb.

Allow me then to ask each of you, "How old art thou?" It is a question which you can answer. There is a great difference between looking backward and looking forward. You know not what a day may bring forth. You cannot tell how long you have to live—But you know how long you have lived. It is a question you *ought* to answer. There is nothing of more importance than to know how you stand with regard to the progress of your time. Time is your most valuable possession. Every thing depends upon it; and, once gone, it can never be recalled. Inquire therefore how much of it is gone; and how much of it probably *remains*.

The days of our years are threescore years and ten. Few indeed reach this period. But this is the general limit. And beyond it no man has a right to look. Philip Henry, therefore, when he entered his seven-

tieth year, always dated his letters, "The year of my dying." Yet have not some of you even passed this period? Are not others near it? and do not even fifty, forty, thirty years make an awful inroad upon the measure? Are you in early life? You think perhaps that you have many, many years before you, during which your eye will see good. But do you learn this from Scripture and observation? Do not both these tell you that childhood and youth are vanity? Are you aged? On what distance are you reckoning before you reach your journey's end? Miles? Furlongs? Feet? There is but a *step* between you and death. Are you old in sin? Your time is ending, and your work not even yet begun!

Here the question assumes a spiritual import. Christians are new creatures. They are born again. How old are we in grace? We have lived really no longer than we have lived to God, a life of faith, hope, holiness, and love. Where then are we in the Divine life? What are we in the family of God? Are we little children, or young men, or fathers in Christ?

Christian! how old art thou? "Old enough to be wiser and better. I blush to think how great my advantages have been, and how I have misimproved them. How long have I been in the best of all schools, and how little have I learned! Lord, clothe me with humility. Enable me to present thee a broken heart and a contrite spirit, which thou wilt not despise"—

"What have I done for him that died
To save my wretched soul?
How have my follies multiplied,
Fast as my minutes roll!"

What am I to do this evening?—

“Lord, with this guilty heart of mine
To thy dear cross I flee;
And to thy grace my soul resign,
To be renew'd by thee.”

Aged Christian! What says your answer to this question?—Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed. A few more descending suns, and “thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw herself; for God shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy sojourning shall be ended.”

DECEMBER 30.—EVENING.

“And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.” GEN. xlvii. 9.

THERE is something very simple and affecting in this representation. It places life before us under the image of a pilgrimage. Such Jacob's life was *literally*. We find him perpetually changing his residence. He never occupied a mansion. What the Apostle says of Abraham applies also to Isaac and Jacob; “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been

mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." This fine passage shews us that Jacob was a pilgrim, not only or principally because of his outward condition, but his spiritual experience. He was allied to another and a nobler world by birth, by his possessions there, and by his advancement towards it.

Life indeed is a pilgrimage, even naturally considered. We never continue in one stay. We pass through successive periods of being: through days, and weeks, and years; through infancy, youth, manhood, and old age: and then we go down to the grave. In this sense none are residents here; all are travellers, hastening the way of all the earth.

But the figure is more strikingly true, if taken in a religious sense. The progression we have just mentioned is not the choice or wish of the multitude: and we can hardly call a man a pilgrim who is driven by force, and carried along as a prisoner or a captive; *he* only deserves the name who has an object in view, and which he is anxious to attain, and towards which he is voluntarily moving. Others are "men of the world;"

"Their hope and portion lies below,
 'Tis all the happiness they know"—

But the Christian has his "conversation in heaven;" and can say,

"What others value I resign,
 Lord, 'tis enough that thou art mine:
 I shall behold thy blissful face,
 And stand complete in righteousness."

But Jacob attaches to his pilgrimage two properties. First, brevity—"Few have the days of the years of my life been." Yet he had lived one hundred and thirty years. But Isaac had lived one hundred and eighty; and Abraham one hundred and seventy-five, and Terah two hundred and five. And what were these ages compared with those before the Flood? And what were those compared with eternity? Yet this properly applies much stronger to our life than to the life of Jacob. There is not a man now living who expects to reach one hundred and thirty. The sacred writers have employed every image importing shortness of duration to characterize the hastiness of our continuance here. A flood. A tale. A vapour. A weaver's shuttle. An eagle pouncing on his prey. What is it, then, when compared with the grand purposes of life—The salvation of the soul! The glorifying of God! The serving of our generation! Surely we have not a moment to lose! And as in a letter, if the paper is small, and we have much to write, we write closer, so let us learn to economize and improve the remaining moments of life.

The second is, misery. Not only "few," but "evil," says he, "have the days of the years of my life been." His history verifies the assertion. At what period was he not called to suffer, from his early leaving his father's house down to the hour when, in the anguish of his soul, he cried, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me"?

But this attribute belongs not to Jacob's life only. "*Man* is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." From this sorrowful experience none are exempted. Evil enters the palace as well as the cottage. Solo

mon, the happiest of mortals as to means and opportunities of enjoyment, tells us not only that "all is vanity," but "vexation of spirit." We are often tempted to discontent by comparisons; yet perhaps the very persons we envy are envying every one else. "The heart," and the heart alone, "knoweth his own bitterness." Let us not promise ourselves in life what life has never yet realized. No condition will answer a high degree of expectation.

Let us go forth into a new portion of our time, sober in our hopes with regard to creatures, but with confidence in God. He is the rock; they are broken reeds. If he is faithfulness and truth, they, at their best estate, are altogether vanity. And, that we may be prepared for all that awaits us, let us seek that grace which can sustain us in the evil hour of adversity, and turn death itself into a blessing. Without this all the evils of time will issue in the miseries of eternity.

"This seems a gloomy view of life." But is it not a true one?—Yet it is not unmingled with good, much good. Our mercies are new every morning. And it becomes us to be thankful that in a world so full of evil we have had, during the months we are closing, so many exemptions, deliverances, alleviations, and comforts.

Besides, this was not our original state, but the consequence of sin. Moral evil produced natural evil. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin"—"Cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto

the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

This state too is not our final one. We may indeed choose to make it so: but the Gospel places within our view, and within our reach, regions of perfect blessedness, where it shall be said, "The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more."

Nor should it be forgotten that the evils of life themselves are rendered useful. What is the effect of sin is also "the fruit to take away sin." The world, even as it now is, is capable of seducing the heart—What would it be if it presented nothing but attraction and indulgence? This changes the aspect of our condition; and not only prevents despondence and murmuring, but enables us to say, it is good for me that I have been afflicted. Oh how the suffering of the present time endears the Scripture! The throne of grace! The sympathy of Jesus! The glory to be revealed!

—Here is one alleviation more. If the days of our pilgrimage be "evil," they are "few." The brevity corrects the bitterness. The fight may be severe, but the warfare will soon be accomplished. The road may be rough, and the weather stormy; but our Father's house—our home is at hand! "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." Amen.

DECEMBER 31.—MORNING.

“Are not my days few?” JOB x. 20.

—NOT years: months: weeks: but days. Life is to be reckoned by *days*. Are not my days *few*? They are so in every respect? relatively, comparatively? absolutely? It will not be necessary to prove this. No one denies it. No one can deny it. Yet how much depends upon the proper use of a truth so obvious, and a reflection so simple! Are not my days few?

—But how came they so? All men die, but not willingly? Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life; but he cannot continue it. He hates, he dreads death. It is the king of terrors. The thought of it embitters his comforts, and keep him always subject to bondage. And could this have been the natural state of man as he came from the hands of his Maker? The Deist meets with this fact, as well as we; and, as he cannot deny it, let him account for it under the empire and agency of a Being who is “omnipotent benevolence.” Revelation gives us the only rational and convincing account—“The body is dead because of sin.” “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death hath passed upon all men, because all have sinned.” It is not “a debt due to nature.” It is the consequence of a judicial and penal infliction: “For all our days are passed away in thy wrath.” We are not struck with this, because we are accustomed to the result; and it gradually takes place. But could we have seen the Deluge destroy-

ing the whole world at once, we should not have questioned the provocation of God by some mighty cause. But where is the difference, as to punitive justice, whether all the criminals are executed together, or led forth one by one? Are not my days few?

—Do not then render them fewer. What! you are ready to exclaim, are we in danger of turning self-murderers? Yet how many are continually reported as having destroyed themselves! But violence is not the only mode of shortening life. One of our most eminent physicians has affirmed, that “the board destroys more than the sword.” Another has said, “Though all men are mortal, not one in a thousand dies a purely natural death.” Many enervate themselves by lying late in bed; and living, if it deserves the name of life, in lazy inactiveness, as injurious to health as to virtue. Envy is the rottenness of the bones. Fretfulness and anxiety corrode. Anger and malice consume. It is needless to mention intemperance and sensuality, the effects of which so often lie down with the sinner in an early grave. Godliness has the promise of the life that now is—by freeing us from the malignant passions, which are always injurious to ourselves, as well as to others; and by inducing the affectionate and benevolent ones, which are always beneficial: by the peace it sheds abroad in the bosom; and the hope and confidence it authorises and inspires, as well as by surrounding us with the care of Providence; it is, as David calls it, “the health of the countenance;” and justifies the admonition of his son—“Fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.” Are not my days few?

—Why then moderate your attachment to every thing that depends upon their brevity. Who would set their heart on that which is not? Who would load with treasure a vessel rotten or full of holes? All the admired distinctions and possessions of the world are very uncertain in themselves, and often leave us: but if they continue with us, we cannot continue with them. We brought nothing with us into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Yet, stripped and naked as we shall go, go we must; and the time of our departure is at hand. Oh! what shall we think, a few days hence, of those pursuits which now so much engross us! "To-morrow we die:" and what will it signify, whether we are carried to the grave from a cottage, or a mansion; or leave behind us much or little? Endeavour to think always, as you will feel soon. "Brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away." Are not my days few?

—Then let us well employ and improve them. This is what Moses prayed for: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." And what is wisdom? This must be determined by circumstances. What is wise conduct in one man may be folly in another, because of their different relations and circumstances. But it is easy to determine what is wisdom in a man who numbers his days, and finds them to be few: and who has, during their continuance, an all-important

interest to secure; and has no other opportunity. If he is guilty, it must be wise in him to seek forgiveness. If he is lost, it must be wise in him to seek salvation; and if he be unable to save himself, it must be wise in him to apply to another, who is appointed for the very purpose. And, in our case, such a one there is. His name is Jesus. He is mighty to save. He is willing to save. Instead of complaining of your application, he only complains of your neglect—Ye will not come to me that ye might have life. Many have tried his power and his love; and recommended him from their own happy experience. He is now on the throne of grace. But he will not be always there. He will soon ascend the tribunal of justice. Seek him while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. Behold, *now* is the accepted time. Behold, *now* is the day of salvation.

This part of our subject branches itself into another line of duty. As you are to *gain* good, so you are to *do* good—and this, too, is equally enforced by the fewness of your days. Life is yours; and it affords you one privilege above the saints in light. It is the opportunity of beneficence—of relieving the poor, of instructing the ignorant, of converting the sinner. But remember two things. *Their* days are few; and therefore they will soon be gone beyond the possibility of receiving relief. And *your* days are few; and you will soon be placed beyond the possibility of affording it. Wing your zeal, therefore, with the thought—"The night cometh wherein no man can work."

—There is a way of lengthening life. It is—not by duration, but by diligence. It is by "filling our

days." It is by doing much business in a little time. Some live longer in a week than others do in a year.

DECEMBER 31.—EVENING.

"He thanked God, and took courage." ACTS xxviii 16.

GRATITUDE and confidence are individually excellent; but their union is admirable. They adorn, and recommend, and aid each other. There is no one they so well become as the Christian. And when is he without cause for both? When has he not, if truth examines his condition, a thousand excitements to praise, and encouragements to hope?

It can never be more proper to exercise these, than at the interesting period of the last day of the year, when we are so naturally and unavoidably led to think of the *past* and the *future*. Let us therefore follow the example of Paul, when he met the brethren at Appii Forum—Let us thank God, and take courage.

What can be more reasonable than to thank God when we review the past? While many have been cut off, and not a few in their sins, we have been carried through another year in safety. We have been exposed to accidents and diseases, as well as they who are now in the dust; and our frame has been as delicate and as frail as their frames. But we are the living, the living to praise him, as it is this day; and all our bones can say, Who is a God like unto thee? While he has holden our souls in life, he has also continued our mercies. These mercies have been new every morning. Of the least of all these we have been unworthy. And had we been

dealt with according to our desert, we should have been the most wretched beings on earth. But we have been fed at his table: we have been clothed from his wardrobe. We have had not only the necessaries, but the comforts and the indulgences of life. He has given us richly all things to enjoy. He has made the outgoings of our mornings and evenings to rejoice. He has given us the succession of the seasons. He has blessed the springing of the earth. He has charmed us in the field and in the garden, with melody, and fragrance, and colours, and tastes. What relative attachments! What endearments of friendship! What pleasing interchanges of solitude and society, of labour and of rest, have we enjoyed!—We have not only to acknowledge private, but public mercies. How has he preserved and blessed our country, notwithstanding all our national provocations! He has not only blessed us personally but relatively. He has been the Benefactor of our families and our friends. Yea, he has blessed us not only in the kindness of his providence, but in the means of grace. We have had our Sabbaths. Our eyes have seen our teachers. We have been made joyful in his house of prayer. He has fed us with the finest of the wheat, and with oil out of the rock has he satisfied us. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!

We have had trials; but even these, instead of checking gratitude, if properly reviewed, will increase it. They have been few, compared with our comforts. They have been light, compared with the sufferings of others. They have been variously alleviated: in measure, when they shot forth, he debated with them; he stayed his rough wind in the

day of the east wind. They have all been founded in a regard to our welfare. They have embittered sin; and endeared the Scriptures, and the Throne of Grace, and the sympathy of Him who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. They have weaned us from the world. They have told us that this is not our rest. They have also assured us that he knows how to support and to deliver. Aaron's rod blossomed—so shall ours; and yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. There was honey at the end of Jonathan's rod—and there is sweetness at the end of ours. Yea, already we can say, It is good for me that I have been afflicted. Surely a gratitude is required on this occasion, that will not expire in mere acknowledgments; but induce me to dedicate myself to his service, and walk before him in newness of life.

And what can be more reasonable than to take courage when we look forward? We enter, indeed, on the year commencing, not knowing what a day may bring forth; and darkness is apt to gender dread. Duties *will* arise; and we must meet their claims. Afflictions *may* arise; indeed they are almost unavoidable. Does not every path of life lead through a vale of tears? Is not every thing here uncertain? My health *may* be assailed. My friends may be removed. This year I may die.

—But I will pore on this no longer. I will not sour my present mercies, by suspicion, or fear, or anxiety. It is my duty, it is my privilege, to be careful for nothing; but to cast all my care on him who careth for me.—I take courage from his former dispensations.—Has he ever forsaken or forgotten me? Because he has been my help, therefore under

the shadow of his wings will I rejoice.—I take courage from his providence. I am not in “a fatherless world.” Nothing is left to chance. My ways are continually before him; and the very hairs of my head are all numbered.—I take courage, from his power. Nothing is too hard for him. He can make even mine enemies to be at peace with me. He can render every loss a gain. He can make all things work together for my good.—I take courage, from his promises. They are all faithfulness and truth. And what case do they leave unnoticed, unprovided for, from which despondency can spring? I will therefore trust and not be afraid, but go forward cheerfully with Him who said—I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.

“Beneath his smiles my heart has liv’d,
And part of heaven possess’d :
I praise his name for grace receiv’d,
And trust him for the rest.”

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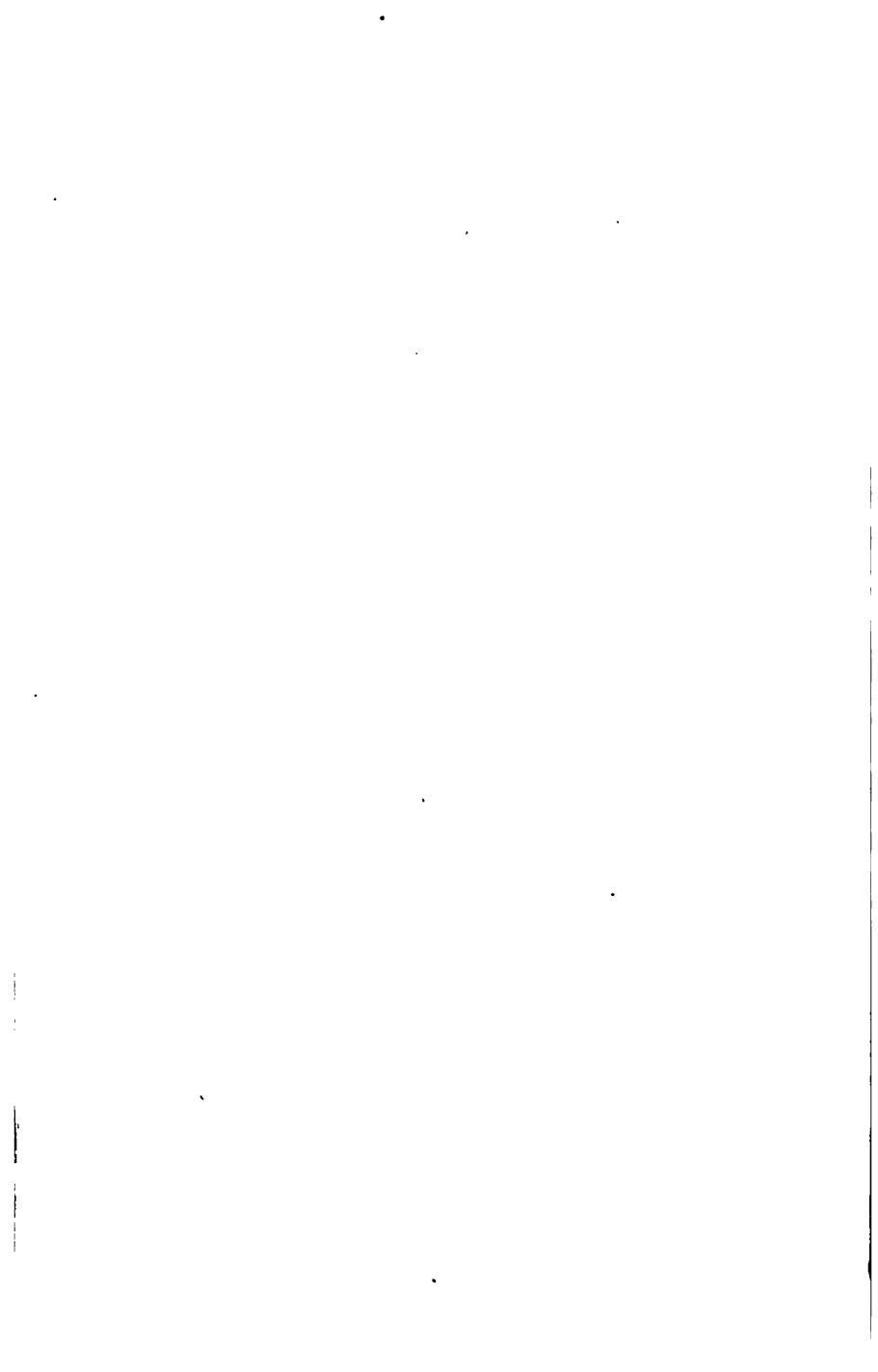
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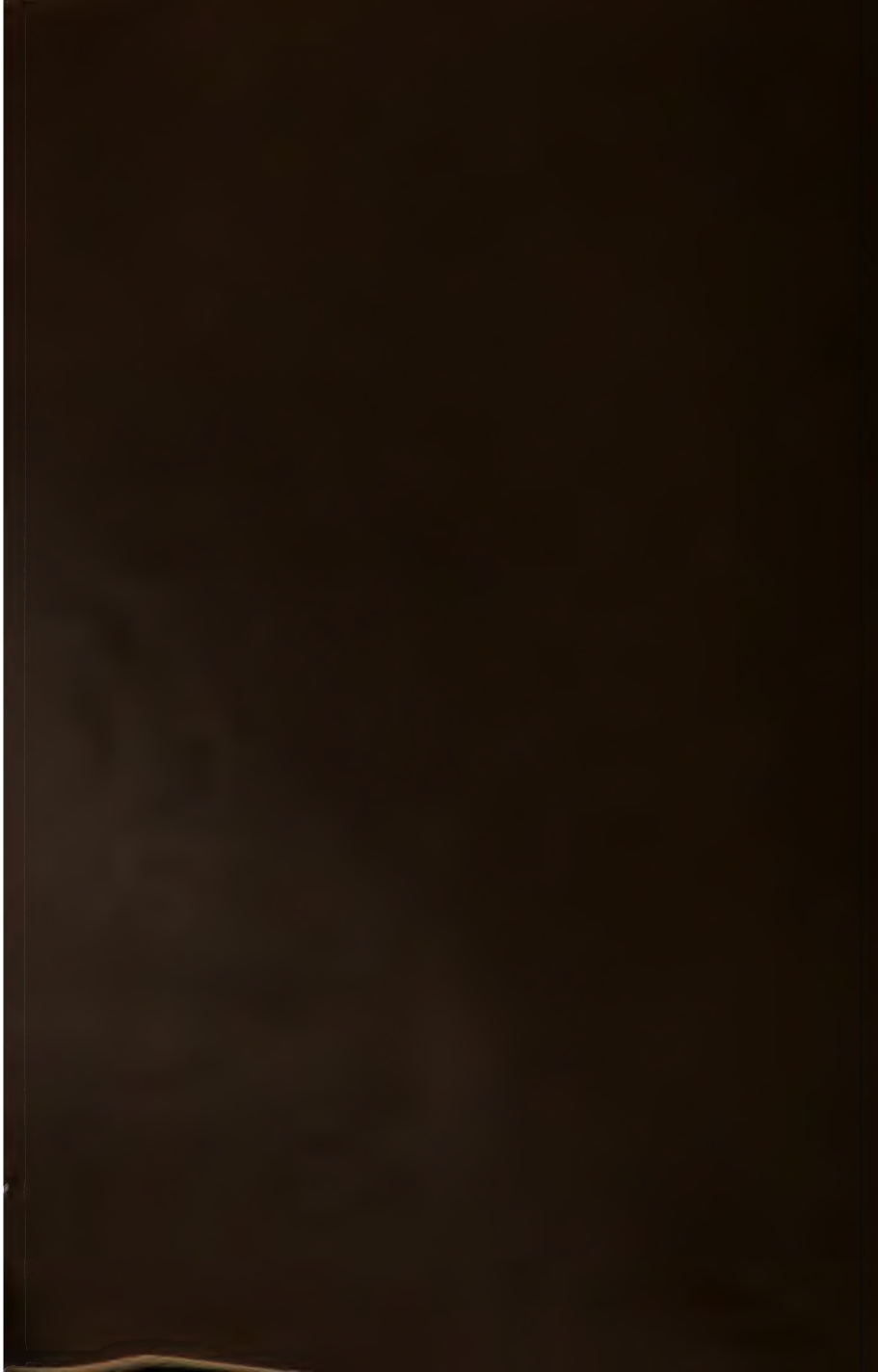






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